

Thanksgiving Day 2024
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney

St. James 1.16-27 St. Matthew 6.25-34

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Every good gift and every perfect present comes down from heaven...they come down from God the Creator of the heavenly lights, who does not change or cause darkness by turning. (James 1.16-17)

This morning's Epistle from James is also read in the two Epistles appointed for the Fourth and Fifth Sundays after Easter respectively. James makes it clear it is not enough for us to just hear God's word...we must put his word into action...through compassionate sharing of the good gifts with the less fortunate.

The two liturgical bookends of the Church's long growing season are the Fifth Sunday after Easter...commonly called Rogation Sunday...and Thanksgiving Day. On Rogation Sunday we get ready to receive the Holy Spirit Jesus promised he would send to strengthen us after he returned to heaven on the Ascension Day. We also bless the seeds the pre-school has planted in our Saint Francis Garden so they will grow into healthy fruits and vegetables that the school teachers can harvest and make healthy meals for the children.

The Trinity Season is the time of personal and parochial spiritual growth. We have heard God's word and we pray the seed of his love planted in our hearts by his Holy Spirit will grow and produce a healthy harvest of love to share with others. The final harvest as our Opening Hymn teaches us is God harvesting us into our final harvest home (heaven). Our prayer is he will hurry up and make this happen soon. Thanksgiving Day is the perfect introduction to the Advent Season...when we consider last things first...and Jesus returning at the end of time.

James tells us God our Father gives us good gifts and perfect presents...not bad gifts and imperfect presents...that is not in his character. He does not change or cause darkness by turning. The sun and the moon cast shadows that are constantly shifting. Stars, comets and other "heavenly lights" in the night sky cause "darkness by turning"...the lights they produce shift, fluctuate or get eclipsed. God's character does not change. His love and faithfulness are constant. He is forever perfect, holy, and his love for us never fails.

James tells us if we do not control our tongues our religion is worthless and we deceive ourselves. We're not supposed to talk incessantly about all the wonderful things we do for God and his Church in front of other people to try to impress them. These are things we are supposed to be doing anyway and we should be doing them quietly. People will know us by our actions...not our words.

What God considers pure and genuine religion, James writes, is to take care of widows and orphans and keep our selves from being corrupted by the world. God want us to show unconditional love and compassion toward those in need...the kind of love that comes from the heart...and that compels us to take action. That is the kind of love and compassion Jesus has for us, and we want to be like him in how we live our lives and in what we do for others.

If we truly believe God the Father has blessed us with the material things in our lives, we first must thank him for those things, and then not hesitate to share what we have with those who have little. True and genuine religion means reaching out to anyone who needs our help. James tells us faith without works is dead. In his Harvest Festival 2019 Sermon, the Reverend Joe Roulston, retired Rector of Rosslyn Chapel, Roslin, Scotland, wrote: "Gratitude without sharing is no gratitude at all...thanks without giving is no thanks at all."

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us not to worry about where our food and clothing are coming from; God knows what we need even before we ask. What about the person who has just lost his job and truly doesn't know where his next meal will be coming from or how he will be able to provide for his family? Please consider making a financial contribution through the Parish to CALL Primrose or any food bank or organization that provides food to individuals that would otherwise go hungry. Saint James tells us what we do to help others really does matter.

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Happy Thanksgiving!

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