

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Beloved in Christ,

Today marks the fourth Sunday in the Easter cycle. Today's first Mass reading is taken from the Letter of St. James, an Apostle of the Lord and the first bishop of Jerusalem. He wrote this epistle to Christian converts from Judaism living outside of Palestine for two reasons. First, he wanted to inform them – and us by extension – that faith alone is not sufficient for salvation: the Christian must manifest his belief by an exterior conduct: he must be a “doer of the Word.” Secondly, he wanted to curb a certain tendency among some towards an excessive desire to instruct others, to argue for the sake of argument: the tongue must be kept in check!

In the opening line of today's lesson James tells his readers to expect trials and temptations in this, their new, Christian life: “Blessed is the man who endures temptations; for when he has been tried, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him.” Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. Therefore, we must know that the sufferings and temptations of this life are not sent by God directly, but rather permitted by Him so we may learn to overcome our passions, that we may win the crown of heaven by having shown ourselves worthy in the Christian struggle. Temptations arise from our own weaknesses, often provoked by those with whom we find ourselves in conflict. But everything which is truly good in the natural and supernatural order comes from God, the giver of “every good gift.” It is Saint James who calls God the “Father of lights” since it is from Him that all light – spiritual and corporeal – proceeds. Most especially, though, it is our Christian re-birth through the great lights of Baptism and the Gospel “word of truth” that constitutes the freest gift from God since He chooses us through them, and that without any merit on our part.

Christians, then, who have received their most precious gift – their holy faith – must offer themselves to God's service by leading truly Christian lives since it is to God that they belong, and it is to God that they are returning. And Christians know what God expects of them – but *knowing* and *doing* can often be worlds apart! So James exhorts us as to how we must *be*: “swift to hear but slow to speak,” thus, ready to learn *spiritual* things in order to practice the same for superna-tural ends and not merely to judge others or con-found our opponents.

In this latter case, arguments are often driven by anger and end in the deeper implication of injuring our progress towards God. This is *particularly* often the case in religious discussions. Since the angry man is not acting according to God's law, a harsh defense of the Christian faith (or any other truth) – no matter what the motive – can *not* please God and thus will hardly lead to changing the hearts of those with whom we are so engaged.

Rather, it is by the example of our good works, that we can principally influence our neighbor. Thus the Christian must remove from his conduct sin and its root causes. He must overcome *sensuality* and its resultant sins which have their origin in the body; and *malice* and its train of evil, which arise from the mind. By doing so we are then able to meekly receive the Gospel, the ingrafted Word. Faith must be ingrafted because it is neither a natural development arising from human nature nor a natural attainment acquired by hu-man endeavor: it is a free, supernatural gift which God plants in our souls, by which He saves us. What is more, St. James does *not* say that faith of itself will bring us to heaven – it cannot. Rather, we must *willingly* cooperate with it by the good-ness of our actions. Therefore we must be “doers of the Word,” and *not* hearers only.

Beloved in Christ, as we near the end of the Paschal season with the approaching mystery of Christ's physical departure from this world and the coming of the Spirit of Truth, we do well to consider the advice given by St. James: the "good gifts" we possess have been given by God to *help us tend towards Him*, and for which we should never cease giving thanks. We should especially thank God for His *spiritual* blessings: the leading of Catholic truth and the divine life of grace in our souls, both of these to the end that we be made ever truer children of God and heirs of that heaven to which – if we would but cooperate – we will go in virtue of Christ's Paschal mysteries.

It is in that place of uncreated light, and finally with glorified bodies, that we will experience the beatific vision to which Jesus refers in today's Gospel reading. We must not fear – we must not let our hearts be sorrowful in the midst of our worldly trials: Christ has communicated His own Paschal life to us through the divine Sacraments, which must ever lead us to deeper confidence in Him. He tells us that in His departure from this world He will send the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. This same Spirit guides us towards the doing of that good which we must do for our salvation; it leads us, as children of light, to the threshold of life eternal. Let us rejoice, therefore, in God's mercy, while continuing faithful to Him, knowing that through the goodness of our actions and fidelity to the Lord's commands, that heavenly destiny can indeed become our own priceless possession – and not merely in time, but for all eternity.