

IV Easter 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

St. James 1.17-21 St. John 16.5-15



Every good gift and perfect present we have originates from God. All good things in life, whether material or spiritual, come from God. He is the source of all blessings. God's gifts are always good and perfect. He does not know how to give bad gifts or imperfect presents. He does not change his nature...he is always faithful and reliable and full of goodness.

This week's Epistle and the one for next Sunday are a continuous reading from James. The two selections are read as one Epistle on Thanksgiving Day. When read together...they focus our attention on hearing God's Word and then putting what we have heard into action. In today's reading, James is concerned about the proper disposition of our hearts for hearing and receiving God's Word. Next Sunday...he gives us an action plan.

God has given us good gifts and perfect presents because he loves us and wants us to have them. He has given us free will to make choices and decisions in our lives. We want our will to conform to God's will...but our human nature often leads us into caving in to what the Collect for the Day calls "the unruly wills and affections of sinful men." We ask God in the Collect to always keep our hearts focused on Jesus, even among "the sundry and manifold changes of the world", and to transform our wills so they conform to his.

James reminds us God has given us life and led us out of darkness into the Light of Christ. We learn from the Book of Genesis he has given us a place in his creation over and above the plants, animals and everything else he created. We have this "Word of Truth" planted in our hearts and should act in ways that are pleasing to God. Our friend, James, has given us sound advice on how we should act...

- We must always be ready to listen and think before we say anything. What we say to another person matters.
- We must not get angry easily because our anger is often self-centered and does not serve God's purpose. Uncontrolled anger can lead to hatred.
- We must always do good things and avoid doing evil things.

- We must submit to God and accept the word he has planted in our hearts; like the seeds planted in our garden by Gazelle School, which we will bless next week, we want God's word planted in our hearts to grow and mature and keep us healthy and strong.
- The good news: God has given us the guidance we need to trust him and understand his plan for us.

We learn about the special gift God has given us to help us trust him and his plan for us in the Gospel. Once again the Gospel takes us back to Maundy Thursday and the Last Supper. Jesus tells his disciples not to be upset because he told them he is getting ready to leave them. When he returns to the Father, he will send a Helper, the Comforter, who will reveal to them the truth about his mission to reconcile the world to the Father.

Jesus said the Comforter...the Holy Helper...will lead us into all truth and make everything clear to us. If we open up our hearts and let the Holy Spirit transform us, we cannot help but say and do what is right and pleasing to God. He enables us as the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent tells us, to "hear, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the words of Scripture...and empowers us to turn what we have heard into right thoughts and right actions.

We are called to be God's people...the community of believers called to be his Church...and that means we are also called to conduct ourselves accordingly. James encourages us to always try to avoid attitudes and behaviors that are unhealthy and self-destructive and lead us away from what God the Father wants for us...which is for us to enjoy his good gifts and perfect presents to the fullest.

Every good gift and perfect present originates from God. The greatest gift and most perfect present God has given us is his Son, Jesus Christ. We want Jesus to come back soon. While we are waiting for him to return, let us ask God to increase the Holy Spirit in our lives so we may see the good gifts and perfect presents he has given us for what they truly are and then to use them wisely.

