

IV Easter 2026

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

St. James 1.1-21 St. John 16.5-15

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There was a time not so long ago we went to our favorite store at the mall to find that good gift and perfect present. Today we just log in to our Amazon account and click on the “buy” button. Then a package magically appears at our front door...sometimes the next day.

Our friend James tells us every good gift and every perfect present comes from heaven. The key word is **every**! They come to us from God...and are not the result of our own efforts. They are inherently good, perfect, and benefit us. God’s good gifts and perfect presents include our physical needs, material possessions, financial resources, and spiritual gifts like love, joy and peace.

James reminds us that God created everything and his character does not change. He is not like the shadows following us on a bright and sunny day that change their shapes depending on the time of day. The sun, the moon, the planets, and our own lives change. God remains constant. His goodness and love for us never change. We owe our very existence to God. He created us in his own image. James calls believers a kind of “first-fruits of His creatures.” We have been set apart by God...called to be his Church...the first part of a larger spiritual harvest of souls.

While all of God’s gifts are good, Jesus is his “greatest and most perfect gift” as Savior and Redeemer of humankind. Jesus is God’s ultimate expression of unconditional love, compassion and mercy...to bring people back to Himself. Throughout the history of humankind...God has consistently showed his love for us and desire to maintain and reinforce the special covenant relationship we have with him.

God’s good gifts and perfect presents are given to us freely. We are supposed to act like mature adults and use His good gifts and perfect presents correctly. We need to do what Judge Judith Sheindlin often says to litigants in her TV courtroom...“Open up our listening ears!” When we do that...we are more likely to process the information we are hearing from someone correctly....and less inclined to become angry. Unchecked anger is destructive and does not serve God or others. Solid practical advice from our friend James.

James tells us to “submit to God and accept the word planted in our hearts, which is able to save us.” We are to humbly receive the Gospel...the Good News about Jesus Christ...and let it transform our lives and save our souls. God’s word is like a seed planted in the ground...to grow and produce good fruit. We are to become mature trees and produce good fruit.

James goes on to say we are to be eager receivers of God’s word. Next week he will tell us hearing the Good News is not enough...we must put it into action. The faith we have in Jesus Christ must be dynamic and outward reaching. A faith that does not lead us into doing good works is cold and lifeless. God’s good gifts and perfect presents in our lives have to be opened up and put to use as God intends.

God gives us the Gift of His Holy Spirit to help us recognize the good gifts and perfect presents he has given us and who helps us figure out the best way to use them. We get the “word of truth” planted in our hearts when we are baptized. God’s gift of the Holy Spirit changes our lives forever. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the strength to keep our faith alive, healthy, and strong.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to be upset because he told them he is getting ready to leave them. He tells them to calm down, because when he returns to the Father, he will send a Special Gift, the Comforter, who will reveal to them the truth about his mission to reconcile the world to the Father. The strength they will receive from the Comforter will make them quickly forget whatever sadness they felt when he returned to the Father in heaven. We get the same strength to do mission for Christ until he returns.

Jesus said the Comforter...the Helper...will lead us into all truth and make everything clear to us. He will help us to say and do the right things. The power of the Holy Spirit 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 it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to turn those words into right thoughts and right actions.

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.

