



Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 30, 2012 B

**Thank you, Bishop James,
for challenging us to be
doers of God's word.**

During the month of September, our second reading has been from the Letter of James, the first bishop of Jerusalem. In the first part of my column, I will focus on a verse from James' first four homilies or exhortations. In the second part, I will address his fifth homily (today's second reading) and share with you some of the text not included in the five readings we listened to this past month.

Week One: "Be doers of the word."

It is easy to come to church and *listen* to God's word, or to gather in a small group and *talk* about God's word, or to *read* the Bible privately in our home or in the Adoration Chapel. But it is quite another thing to *act* on God's word. In all my commentaries on the Sunday readings that small groups use, there is the part called *Responding to God's Word* that asks the reader to "name one way you can *act* on this week's reading." Whenever I sit in on a small group, I find that this is the question most participants struggle with. Yet, it is the most important question of all. When it comes to Scripture, I can be a great scholar, but a little illiterate woman living in the slums of some Third World country may well have a better understanding of the word because of her willingness to *act* on what she hears.

Week Two: "Show no partiality."

Treat everyone with the same dignity and respect, rich and poor, black and white, Christian and non-Christian, male and female, gay and straight. To what extent do we act on this word of God?

How often do we judge certain people to be more important and more deserving of our attention just because of the way they dress, because of their status or rank in society, because of the kind of house they live in, etc.? "Showing no partiality" is not an easy message to live by as all of you who volunteer at Daily Bread, the Thrift Shop and Social Concerns know well. It is not easy to treat all who enter these places as our brothers and sisters equal in dignity and importance before God.

Week Three: "Faith without works is dead."

To say I believe in Jesus but fail to allow his gospel to impact the way we live is useless. True faith should impact the way we spend our time, treasure and talent, the way we deal with life's losses and hurts, the way we interact with our neighbors, co-workers, fellow parishioners. Can you name one example of how your faith impacted a decision you made this past week?

Week Four: *Inner Cravings*

James speaks about the "inner cravings" that can get us into a lot of trouble. The reading starts with: "*Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.*" He also says that "*wars and conflicts come from within*" which is a very challenging message. All of us know that when we or others are not able to discipline our emotions, a lot of conflict erupts. We might ask ourselves: What emotion do we have the toughest time dealing with?

Week Five: *Rich share with the poor*

In today's second reading, Bishop James of Jerusalem speaks some very challenging words to those of us who have been blessed with material wealth.

*Come now, you rich,
weep and wail over your impending miseries.
Your wealth has rotted away,
your clothes have become moth-eaten,
your gold and silver have corroded,
and that corrosion will be a testimony against you;
it will devour your flesh like a fire.
You have stored up treasure for the last days.
Behold, the wages you withheld from the workers
who harvested your fields are crying aloud;
and the cries of the harvesters
have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.
You have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure;
you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter.
You have condemned;
you have murdered the righteous one;
he offers you no resistance.*

In this reading, James harshly condemns the rich for failing to share their wealth with those in need. He also condemns them for getting richer by paying their employees an unjust wage.

We might ask: What do we *feel* and *think* when we listen to or read the above Scripture verses? Most likely: “Thank, God, that I am not one of those rich ones.”

But wealth, like most things, is relative. When we place ourselves in the *global* village that we live in, all of us are among the rich, even if some are much richer than others. When we even compare ourselves to those who come into our *Social Concerns* office, we are rich. It is not our wealth that will condemn us. Rather, it is our failure to *share* it. It is our failure to bless others with the blessings we have received from on high.

When it comes to giving, the invitation is always to ‘do the math.’ The Bible speaks about giving a tithe of our income to God’s work. Our Church speaks of giving 5% to the Church and 5% to the poor. The question is: how willing are we to do the math? By doing so, we can measure more accurately how generous we are and to what extent the Church and the poor figure in our financial priorities. James’ tough words in today’s second reading are directed towards those who fail to share their blessings. The Gospel always makes a distinction between the greedy rich and the giving rich. In recent conversations with parishioners, some have said they wish they had given more money away rather than losing it in the stock market.

Three other texts from James

The five readings from James that we listened to this month do not cover all that James has to say to us. Three other texts worth noting are those that speak of sins of the tongue, the Sacrament of the Sick, and bringing stray members of the flock back into the fold.

Sins of the tongue. In chapter 3, James has a long section on the use of the tongue. In 3:9, he says: “*With our tongues we bless the Lord and curse human beings.*” Most if not all of us are guilty of misusing God’s wonderful gift of speech. In the confessional I sometimes ask people to reflect on what it would be like to suffer a stroke and not be able to speak. If such a terrible thing happened to us, we might promise God that if he gave us back the gift of speech, we would try very hard to avoid all misuse of this wonderful gift.

Sacrament of the Sick. In James 5:14-16, we find the foundational text for the Sacrament of the Sick. “*If anyone among you is sick, he should summon the priests of the Church, and they should pray over him and anoint*

him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.”

The terminally ill should receive the sacraments of the dying, i.e., Confession, Communion and the Sacrament of the Sick. Ideally, the Sacrament of the Sick should also be given before a serious surgery.

Bringing back the stray. James’ letter to us ends with these words: “*My brothers, if one of you strays away from the truth, and another brings him back to it, he may be sure that anyone who can bring back a sinner from the wrong way that he has taken will be saving a soul from death and covering up a great number of sins.*” (JB translation)

Wow—what a great promise! James tells us that if we are instrumental in bringing back a stray soul to God, we will be wiping out a multitude of sins. That is one reason we should often invite a non-churchgoer to come to church with us, invite them to a retreat, give them a copy of Matt Kelly’s book on *Catholicism Rediscovered*.

Book: *Marriage 911*

Next weekend’s Gospel focuses on marriage and divorce. *Marriage 911—How God Saved Our Marriage (And Can Save Yours Too)*. The authors of this book, Greg and Julie Alexander, tell the story of how they believed that divorce was the only way out of their lifeless and loveless relationship. The book shares how their marriage had run out of wine and how they discovered the new wine that healed their broken relationship.

Have a blessed week,

