



## Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time B September 30, 2018

### Five Lessons from St. James' Letter to Us

Every three years during the month of September, we listen to five excerpts from the Letter of St. James.

In the first part of my column, I will recall key verses from the first four weeks' readings. Next, I will focus on today's reading. Finally, I will name other key verses in James not included in the five readings that we listened to during the month of September.

#### Week 1: *"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 used by our small groups, there is the part called *Responding to God's Word* which 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, we may be great scholars, 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.

Also in Week 1, James exhorts us: ***"Humbly welcome the Word that has been planted in you and is able to save souls."***

What a beautiful exhortation to us to humbly welcome God's Word into our hearts. But we know how we can:

- ◆ close our hearts to God's Word, especially when it is something we do not want to hear.
- ◆ *listen* to God's Word and not act on it.

***Reflection question:*** To what extent would you say you are a doer of God's Word?

#### Week 2: *"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.

***Reflection question:*** How easy or hard is it for you to treat everyone with equal respect?

#### Week 3: *"Faith without works is dead."*

To say we 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.

***Reflection question:*** Can you name one example of how your faith impacted a decision you made this past week?

#### Week 4: *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 can erupt.

**Reflection question:** Name one emotion (e.g., patience) that you have a difficult time dealing with?

### Week 5: *The rich should 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 of us are much richer than others. When we even compare ourselves to those who come into our *Social Concerns* office or go to Daily Bread, 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*. Many rich people are very generous with their financial resources.

### 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 the 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)

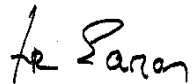
Wow—what a great promise! James tells us that if we are instrumental in bringing back a stray soul to God, we will be wiping out a multitude of sins.

The above words from James should motivate us to be constantly doing what we can to save a soul. How?

- ◆ Pray for family members and others who are away from God and Church
- ◆ Share a devotional reading or other sacred readings with those who are away from God and Church; perhaps share this column
- ◆ Invite, invite and invite people to the men and women’s retreat weekends; invite folks to join a parish ministry

Scripture scholar William Barclay writes: *“The highest honour God can give is bestowed upon those who lead others to God, for everyone who does that does nothing less than share in the work of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of all.”*

Have a blessed week,



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## Morning Prayer

I thank you, Lord,  
for the wonder of my being,  
for giving me another day  
to love and serve you,  
and enjoy the awesome beauty  
of your creation.

May I often think of you during this day.

Inspire everything that I say and do.

May it all begin from you  
and with your unfailing help,  
be carried through for your glory,  
through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

## Just for Today

My life is but an instant, a passing hour.

My life is but a day that escapes and flies away.

O my God! You know that to love you on earth

I only have today.

Lord, what does it matter if the future is gloomy?

To pray for tomorrow, oh no, I cannot!

Keep my heart pure, cover me with your shadow  
just for today.

O divine Pilot! whose hand guides me,

I’m soon to see you on the eternal shore.

Guide my little boat over the stormy waves

in peace, just for today.

Amen.

## Prayer of Spouses and for Each Other

Lord Jesus, grant that my spouse and I

may have a true and understanding love for  
each other.

Grant that we may both be filled  
with faith and trust.

Give us the grace to live with each other  
in peace and harmony.

May we always bear with one another’s  
weaknesses and grow from each other’s  
strengths.

Help us to forgive one another’s failings  
and grant us patience, kindness,  
cheerfulness, and the spirit of placing the  
well-being of one another ahead of self.

May the love that brought us together  
grow and mature with each passing year.

Bring us both closer to you  
through our love for each other.

Let our love grow to perfection.

Amen.