

Word of God

James 1:16-21 (ESV)

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

O Lord, implant your word in us, that with good and faithful hearts, it may bud and grow and bear much fruit. Amen.

Dear Catechumens and all Christians,

Today is a special moment. These dear children of God will publicly confess the faith which they confessed at their Baptisms. They will affirm the great treasures which God has given them. Among these is the treasure of God's word. They have regularly received it as part of their upbringing, but they have especially received the Word of God in their time of catechesis. This was the expectation: that they receive all the necessary tools and means for a lifetime of learning from the Scriptures. But why all this care? Why do we spend so much time teaching these youth and all who should inquire of belonging to this Christian congregation? What is the point? St. James gives us the reason in the reading from his letter. James gives us the reason for our heavy and intense focus on the Scriptures. He shows us that,

THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL FOR YOUR LIVES.

The Word of God has granted you a special grace; it has given you a new birth. St. James says, **“Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”** This word which you have received brought you out of death and into life. Now you are the firstfruits of God's creatures. This means you are special and holy to the Lord. You are special heirs, recipients of God's inheritance. You are destined to receive everything your heavenly Father has. You do not receive the crumbs of the leftovers; but, the rich and decadent food meant for royalty.

What is presented is spectacular. Yet, I think the method which God accomplishes this is even more amazing. All this he has accomplished comes through the handing over of the word of truth. Truth has given this to you. The truth of God has brought you to be a new child of God. What is this truth? It is the reality and certainty of what exists. It is a rock; a sure thing. Everything else is passing away; it will not exist; it comes and goes. But, the truth remains. It is the real thing.

Because you are born and brought forth from this word of truth, you are to be like the truth. You are to be steadfast, to be certain and immovable. In this way you imitate your heavenly Father. St. James says, **“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”** You are not to be deceived, or to be misled. You are to remain on the straight and narrow pathway; not drifting to the right hand or to the left. Your heavenly Father is the same and remains a constant. He does not change. He does not go back and forth between different states; like when the moon changes from phase to phase; a full moon here and a small crescent there. Your heavenly Father, the Father of lights, grants every good and perfect gift which you have, do, and will receive.

There will be temptation, there will be opportunities to be misled. You might be misled into falling for lies; into trusting, depending, and relying on people and things which are not a rock, a sure thing. All these opportunities to be misled come not from the Father of lights. He only grants good and perfect gifts. If there is any doubt, any uncertainty about whether God is willing to grant you good things, this comes from one's own evil desires; it comes from lies down below. Flee to the rock; flee to the place where you have received the certainty of truth. Where has that promise of your adoption as God's sons and daughters been given? Where can you point to the place of rebirth, the place you were made a firstfruit of creation? Behold the font! Behold the fountain of youth! Here in these holy waters is your rock and refuge, your word of truth. Do not be misled, beloved children of God. There will be many lies presented to you; and they might even sound like the truth. But, they will not be the good and perfect gift which has come down from your Father of lights.

Where is the promise that this rock of refuge, God's word, will be able to help? How do you know that it is a certain and sure help? Listen to St. James again, **"receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"**. Many things can promise you salvation. When we say salvation, you probably think of it as a church word. People off the street, in your schools or workplaces, in your extracurriculars or hobbies, they usually don't speak of "salvation." Yet what people will suggest or encourage are means for you to be happy; or to be satisfied; or to have good self-esteem; or to feel safe; or to be who you really are. All of these and more, are promised by many things in life: careers, activities, drugs, meditation, therapy, surgeries, communities and social groups, activism, and so on and so on. You will hear that these and more can promise you what falls under "salvation" because at its core salvation is being rescued from every harm and danger; it is rescue from pain and hurt; it is rescue from guilt and apathy. Yes, some of those things I listed can be used for your good. But, only when it's subservient, when it is ruled by the word of God. The word of God is *always* first because it is the only way for your soul to be saved. Everything else is shifting sand compared to the rock of God's word.

So what does it look like to rely on God's word for your salvation? How do you depend on it? You receive it with meekness. If I gave you a cool sum of cash (from my vast resources as a vicar), what would you do? Would you go dig a hole in the ground, bury it, and never touch it again? No, then the money would be useless! So is the Word of God for those who are not daily nourished by it. Receive the word of God! There your Lord reveals himself. There he shows you his character: who he is and what he does. There he shows you how you should relate to him. There you see how he has ordered your life and the lives of many believers who have gone before you. There he shows you how you may approach him and receive from him. There he warms you and keeps you from committing great evil. Put yourself under the Word of God. Submit to it. Learn from it. Do not presume that you know better how to live your life than the one who has created, sustained, redeemed, and sanctified it.

When you submit yourself under God's word, when you receive it with meekness, your actions and behavior will change. This is encouraged by St. James: "**let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness**". These are the signs of humility: listen first, talk later, commend all things to God. Anger and pride go hand in hand. Why would someone be angry? Usually it's because something doesn't go his way. He didn't get what he wanted. He becomes upset because someone else failed and ended up messing things up. Do you see the problem with this? Do you see the filth and wickedness that comes from man's anger? Yes someone might have failed; someone might have done wrong. Some things might not be fair. There is evil and injustice, even in our midst. But, that doesn't mean that *you* are in authority. This is the temptation of anger: to think that *you* are in charge and *you* get to have what you want. You could very well be right in diagnosing the problem; but that doesn't mean you have the right, authority, or responsibility to fix it. Be quick to listen, but slow to speak. Your anger will not lead to God's righteousness, to God's justice, to God's goodness. Dear Christian, do not be misled by your anger, it never amounts to good. Rather submit your cares and concerns to God; receive his word with meekness. Let him establish his truth and righteousness.

God does not change. He has been constant in mercy towards you so far. He has washed you with the waters of regeneration. He has taught you from his sacred writings. He invites you to come and eat of his Son's blessed Supper. His mercy has been constant and a firm rock of certainty. Do not forget the power of his Word. Do not swerve from the paths of his righteousness. Receive his Word with meekness; for it made you into the first fruits of his creation, and it has the power to save your soul. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.