



James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (September 1, 2024)

A wealthy Hindu woman came to Mother Teresa offering aid. During the conversation, she admitted how much she loved beautiful saris; in fact, she spent 800 rupees each month on a new sari. Mother Teresa, whose distinctive white cotton sari with a blue stripe cost 8 rupees, thought this the place to begin. “Next time, when you go to buy a sari, instead of buying a sari for 800 rupees, you buy a sari worth 500 rupees and with the remaining 300 you buy saris for the poor people.” More than the shifting of money was at stake; the elegance of a sari was a symbol of a woman’s status, her level in the caste system. But the woman did it, and over time came down to paying just 100 rupees for her sari, giving the rest away. Teresa urged her, “Please do not go below 100!”

Let us see what the apostle James has to say about generosity to the suffering Twelve Tribes in the Diaspora (1:1) about God’s plan.

“Every *generous act* of giving, with every *perfect gift*, is from above, coming down *from the Father of lights*, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (v. 17)

If anyone has experienced the beauty, satisfaction, and fulfillment of giving and receiving a gift, let this one know that in **generosity** we find one of the core traits of God. Love expresses itself in giving. When we know love we know and enjoy giving.

The **good and temporal gifts** we give one another are from God who gives us all we need and sustains and nurtures us. God also gives us **perfect and eternal gifts** for the purpose of developing our spiritual life and drawing us closer to God. Contemplative prayer and meditation allow us to discover, enjoy, and employ those perfect possessions.

Only good things come from God: God is good, all the time. And God is not moody or capricious. Evil things (i.e., wars, gun violence, cancer, broken families, global warming) do not come from God but from our ignorance and callousness. It's bad theology to say God must have a reason for bad things to happen. James counsels: "God tempts no one." (v. 13)

For God's "own purpose God gave us birth by the word of truth." (v. 18)¹

God's purpose is to share Joy and infinite Love. This happens within the community of the Trinity and takes shape in the creation of all things, big and small. Because creation reflects the generosity of God, all is good and beautiful. Disconnection and alienation from God are a sin and contrary to God's will.

Salvation is redemption from what is false. It is reconciliation, the restoration to the Truth of God, a new birth. Lying, that resides in the darkest corners of our soul, is disruptive of the community and totally opposite to the plan of the "Father of lights" which is the generation of community, the bringing together, the communal delight of the Unity of God.

¹ See also 1 Peter 1:23

God has adopted us as children by grace through faith² when we have received the Word of Truth as proclaimed by the apostles.³ Children of the heavenly Father live in the light of God's Truth.⁴

So, as children of God, *how do we behave* towards one another? What *feelings* do we nurse in our souls?

“You must understand this, my beloved: **let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger**; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.” (verses 19-20)

James doesn't say, *slow* to listen, *quick* to speak, *quick* to anger.

Anger is not of God and becomes a barbed wire barrier between us and God. When we do not control our anger and let it flare up, the tongue is quick to cut and to hurt. We will almost always accomplish more by measured words and actions than by flying off the cuff in anger. *Will Rogers* once said, “People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.”

Anger blinds us to the light and truth of our **common standing before God**: sinners redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus, members of the Body of Christ, connected to and dependent on one another. Anger frustrates unity.

When we gossip, when we consider others as our enemies, we do not live by the Spirit of Jesus and step outside and away from the Communion of Saints. Stop gossiping in its track and do not pass it on. If you are prone to gossip, learn to transform it into a tool for personal improvement: use others not as a trash can in which you toss your garbage but as a sounding board who can help you see reality with different eyes. Be receptive and open minded. Could that be the beginning of a reconciliation process?

² Ephesians 2:8

³ Ephesians 1:13-14

⁴ 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 4:19-21; Matthew 7:21-23.

James continues: “**Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness ..., and welcome with meekness the *implanted* word that has the power to save your souls.**” (v. 21)⁵

In other words, throw out what doesn't help and, in all humility, give priority to the Word of God implanted in you. Act on the Word of salvation. Let it guide you. Trust its power to transform and do what it says. Put your faith at work, don't just say you have faith. Let not your religiosity become stale and worthless.

Jesus tells us today that “it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come” (Mk 7:21). If we *care* for our heart, it will then be easier to guard our mouth and practice our faith.

So, what are we waiting for? Could it be that the advice to be “quick to listen and slow to speak” needs to be applied to our *prayer life* also? We think of prayer as talking to God, and that is OK. The trouble is, we run away as soon as we say “amen” before God has a chance to reply. Listening to God is far more important than giving God our ideas.

Prayer can also be *listening quietly for God to speak* to us. One way to listen is to read a passage from the Bible and ask God to help us to understand how that passage applies to us and then listen prayerfully for the answer. Another way is to sit still before the Lord and consent to God's light to fill us.

Contemplative prayer is not only for monks and pastors!

We have a responsibility to *nurture holy things* rather than evil things in our hearts. Caring for our spiritual life is as important as caring for our physical and emotional wellbeing. Spiritual intake is as important if not more important than what we put into our mouth. May spiritual self-care inspire holy living, amen.

⁵ See also Romans 6:1-4