



James

Trials & Temptations

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

We all have two things in common. We all face trials of various kinds, and we have all been tempted to do something we shouldn't. For many, trials are met with a "hope for the best" attitude and temptations with a "well, I'm only human" comment. We learn in this lesson that trials are meant for something and temptations can be met head on. For the Christian, trials can actually be a source of joy because we know that we can mature as a result of them. Our joy stems from the fact that we have God's grace available to us in the midst of the trial. Some people think that, because they are unable to avoid trying circumstances, they should resign themselves to them. They adopt the idea of "whatever will be will be." But resignation is passive. Christians are called to actively persevere resulting in maturity. Resignation results in defeat; perseverance in triumph. While going through this study, take note of how you have typically dealt with adversity and temptation and note how God has equipped you to meet the challenges of life. Whatever obstacles may come your way, be assured that you have a loving heavenly Father, your older brother, Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit, your mother, Mary, and the Saints to meet you in the midst of your challenges.



James 1:1-18

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greeting.
2 Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, 8 unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord. 9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flower of the grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits. 12 Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; 14 but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. 15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good endowment 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. 18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.





Catholic Scripture Study



Questions on the Text

Have you ever...

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you needed wisdom but didn't know where to turn?
2. Have you ever faced a trial and didn't think you could endure it?
3. Have you struggled with temptations?



Homework

1. Based on your observations, how does society deal with trials and temptations?
2. When faced with difficult situations, who or what do you turn to first?
3. When it comes to trials, what areas do we seem to be most vulnerable in? Why?
4. In dealing with trials, what is the area that you need to improve on most?
5. James tells us that "the testing of your faith produces steadfastness" and bid us "let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Do you know of somebody in your life for whom this has actually happened? What is it about them that impresses you? Have you ever persevered steadfastly through a difficulty and "come out the other side" to peace?



Questions for Reflection

1. The word dokimion is used in 1:3 for the process of "testing." This same word is used for sterling coins that are "genuine" or "without alloy." The aim of a trial is to purge us of all impurities and become Christlike. Looking at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46), what can we learn about our wills in the midst of trials? Using Christ as our example, what can we learn from Jesus about our wills in the midst of a trial?
2. The Greek word used for both "trials" and "temptations" is peirasmos. When used for the word "trials," peirasmos speaks of a testing with a goal to become strong and pure. This word was used when the Queen of Sheba tested Solomon with hard questions (1 Kings 10:1), and Abraham was tested by God when asked to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1). What are some typical trials that Christians go through today?
3. When Israel conquered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Canaanites still remained in the land. God said in Judges 2:21-23 that he did not drive out all the Canaanites but left some in the land that He may test Israel, whether they would walk in the ways of the Lord. With this in mind, and in light of your current trials, what might God be trying to do in your life in terms of walking in his ways?
4. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." What does this text say about God's knowledge of you?





Questions for Reflection (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

5. The Gospel speaks about a time when the Lord was lead out into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil. According to Matthew 4:1-11 how did Jesus deal with temptation?

6. James describes sin as having a sort of gestation and maturation period. He writes, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death.” Everybody has “nursed” sin at some point in their lives. How do we cut off that process of gestation, birth and maturity for sin in our lives?

7. Pope John Paul II said, “The Spirit intervenes with a deep, continuing action at every moment and under all aspects of Christian life in order to guide human desires in the right direction, which is the direction of generous love of God and neighbor, following the example of Jesus. For this purpose the Holy Spirit strengthens the will, making the person capable of resisting temptations and of gaining victory in internal and external struggles. The Spirit enables the Christian to overcome the power of evil and especially Satan, like Jesus who was led by the Spirit into the desert (cf. Lk 4:1), and of fulfilling the demands of a life according to the Gospel” (General audience of June 26, 1991). According to Romans 8:26-27, how does the Holy Spirit help us and what is the advantage of the Holy Spirit interceding for us?

8. James tells us if we lack wisdom, “ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him.” What resources has God freely handed us by which we can gain wisdom? How might we make those resources a part of our lives? What obstacles stand in the way of gaining that wisdom? How might they be overcome?

9. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (#2547) tells us, “The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods...Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow. Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor. They shall see God.” James echoes the same thought in his consolations to the poor and warnings to the rich. What concrete steps can we take to make an act of trust in God and not in riches on a daily basis?

10. James tells us, “Every good endowment 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.” However, our lives are in continual states of change. How do we take the “heavenly perspective” and see our constantly changing lives through the eyes of Him who does not change?

11. James tells us to “count it all joy.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1722) tells us that “grace ... disposes man to enter into the divine joy.” Most people imagine that joy is a feeling, not a fruit of grace. Further, most people think that joy is something that happens to you, like a mood, not a thing you “enter into” as Jesus tells us to do (Matthew 25:21). How do we as Catholics respond to the revolutionary teaching of the gospel that joy is a gift of God to be “entered into” rather than a random mood we must wait for like a change in the weather?





Catholic Scripture Study



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

What is the Catholic Teaching on Redemptive Suffering?

In coming to grips with suffering, a Catholic should bear in mind both James 1:2 ("Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials") and verse 17 ("Every good endowment 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.") Because we have this eternal Father, we can have an eternal perspective that arises from the eternal goal that awaits us. That alone not only makes sense out of our suffering, it turns our sufferings into something with redemptive power. That is absolutely novel and revolutionary in human history! Nothing else before or after Christianity has really grasped that suffering can be redemptive. To be sure, the acorn is already present in pre-Christian Judaism and is starting to sprout, but only really takes root and bears fruit in the Tree upon which Christ hung. The audience to which James wrote was facing two tendencies in pagan thought. On the one hand was Stoicism, which said, "Keep a stiff upper lip, bear suffering with a straight face" but which never thought for moment to "count it all joy." On the other hand, another pagan school of thought was Platonism which considered the body as a sort of prison for the soul and so could, at times, "rejoice" at the suffering of the body because it was a kind of death knell for the jailer. Both pagan thought systems had a germ of truth, but both were mixed with tremendous error as well. The Stoic was right to say we have to bear it, but he couldn't explain why we could possibly count it joy. The Platonist was right to look upon the body as a temporary dwelling, but wrong to think the goal of life was to become disembodied. He did not know about the Resurrection. And so he thought the body was bad, whereas, in reality, it is the second-highest good. That is why we are called, like Jesus, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). There is no point to offering garbage as a sacrifice, only that which is best. And you offer that which is best to show there is One you prefer even more.

So how do we offer our suffering to God? In different ways. If we're suffering illness, we recognize our own human affliction and weakness. Certainly, we seek treatment, but in the meantime we grow in patience through endurance, knowing that even these sufferings can be united with Jesus on the cross. If sufferings are due to persecution for righteousness' sake, that's pure gold without any dross. That is, we can thank God that he has honored us to share in Christ's own sufferings. On the other hand, if our suffering is due to punishment for sin, even those can be united to Christ as we see the Good Thief crucified with Jesus did with his sufferings. In addition, it should be noted that some of the most intense forms of suffering are not physical but spiritual. James, for instance, gives no hint that he's speaking to a persecuted church. Rather, he addresses his consolations to poor Christians being exploited by the rich (many of whom appear to be Christian themselves). Also, there is the intense suffering, not of dying ourselves, but watching a loved one die as Mary had to watch Christ die. To bear such suffering, or to bear the betrayal of friends whom we trusted as Jesus bore betrayal and abandonment by his disciples is to be very close to the Spirit of Christ. The bottom line is: there is no realm of human suffering outside of Christ. Some forms of suffering are most perfectly Christlike, but every form of suffering is, in some way, able to draw us closer to Christ.

Trials and Temptations

Are trials from God and temptations from concupiscence? To answer that, we need to know what is "concupiscence." The Catechism of the Catholic Church (para. 1264) tells us that, though baptism removes original sin, nonetheless "certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

Tradition calls concupiscence, or metaphorically, 'the tinder for sin' (fomes peccati); since concupiscence 'is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ.' [Council of Trent (1546): DS 1515.] We may say that trials are from God and temptations are from concupiscence.

Interestingly, the same word in Greek (peirasmos) is used for both "trial" and "temptation." A trial is an external test. A temptation is an internal test. The same word is used in James 1:2 and then again in James 1:12-13. We have to recognize the different meanings from the context. In verse 2, we are told that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness. So it involves endurance, perseverance, patience and courage. It's like a muscle work-out for the soul, making healthy muscles even stronger. In contrast, the internal test we undergo due to our own weakness is what is described in verses 12 and 13. James relates this passage back to verse 2 and says, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life". But then he goes on in verse 13 to say, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." So, on the one hand, we are exalted by trial yet humbled by temptation. Whenever these disordered desires arise in our hearts, we should take a good long look in the mirror (described by James as the "perfect law of liberty" in verses 23-25) and repent. So, in temptation, we endure suffering, not like athletes at the gym, but as sick people going through physical therapy. Yet both have their place in God's plan to do us good.

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

No. 2846-2849 Lead us not into temptation

No. 45 "When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrow or trials" (St. Augustine)

No. 769 "The Church, and through her the world, will not be perfected in glory without great trials."

No. 1742 "...the more docile we are to the promptings of grace, the more we grow in inner freedom and confidence during trials..."

Family Devotions

The Rosary is a wonderful prayer when facing trials and temptations. Made up of fifteen mysteries, the Rosary covers the Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious points in the life of Jesus and Our Lady. No matter where you are in life, you can find yourself somewhere in the Rosary. As Pope John Paul II says, "At the same time our heart can enclose in these decades of the Rosary all the facts that make up the life of the individual, the family, the nation, the Church and mankind. Personal matters and those of one's neighbor, and particularly of those who are closest to us, who are dearest to us." During trials, walk with Jesus and draw on the strength of your Mother who is interceding for you. What ever you are going through, remember, the Rosary "beats the rhythm of human life" (Angelus, 10/29/78).

Rome to Home

A papal quote relating to the lesson:

"The Gospel of suffering is being written unceasingly, and it speaks unceasingly with the words of this strange paradox: the springs of divine power gush forth precisely in the midst of human weakness. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world's Redemption, and can share this treasure with others" (Salvifici doloris, 27). Pope John Paul II





Catholic Scripture Study



Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

“This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (Gaudium et Spes). Pope Paul VI

Summary

Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

It's important to distinguish between the trials and temptations in your life. A trial is the testing of your faith with the hopes that you will become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. As your heavenly Father, His desire for you is maturity. 1 Peter 4:12-13 says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” When you face a trial, immediately turn to the Lord in prayer and search for the test. What does God want to accomplish in your life? Ask for the wisdom that you are lacking. Your heavenly Father will generously give wisdom to you without putting you down for not knowing. Keep your eyes and heart open to God’s wisdom, in the Scriptures, the Catechism, in the homily or through a family member or friend.

Temptation is something that we all have to deal with in our lives. When you are tempted to do something that is unpleasing to the Lord, don’t blame the Lord, run to Him. If you don’t deal with the temptation, but continue to feed it, that desire will conceive and give birth to sin, ending in death. Once again, call on the wisdom of the Lord and heed the words of Paul to the Corinthians, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

A Message from the Authors

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Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

