



James

Putting the Word into Practice

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

In the last lesson we focused on dealing with trials and temptations. It is on the heels of that subject that James gives us some very valuable pastoral wisdom: “Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20). Think about it. The pressures and tensions of trials usually make us slow to listen and quick to speak, and when under stress, we usually speak angrily. The anger we vent on our loved ones is usually the result of a trial we are going through, whether it be financial, health or work related. Also, during a trial we have a tendency to not listen well, rather we formulate what we want to say while the person we are talking to struggles to be heard. James teaches us that as Christians we should be meek--a disposition of learning and receiving--as opposed to anger that usually carries with it the attitude of telling and demanding. In addition to the above wisdom, James tells us to do two things: 1) put away filth and evil from your life and 2) welcome the word that has been planted in you. As a good pastor, James warns us about a deadly pattern of deception, which is hearing the word of God but not doing it. If we hear the word of God but do not do what it says, we are treating the word as if it were powerless. We have deceived ourselves about the very nature and purpose of the word of God. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrew 4:12).



James 1:19-27

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. 19 **Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger,**





Catholic Scripture Study



James 1:19-27 (cont.)

20 for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. **22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.** 23 For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing. 26 If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.



Questions on the Text

Have you ever...

1. Have you ever been so angry that you said something you instantly wanted to take back?
2. Have you ever heard something in a homily and said to yourself, "I really need to do that," only to go home and forget it?
3. Have you ever found yourself laughing at an inappropriate joke and afterward feeling badly inside?

Homework

1. When it comes to anger, in what areas are you typically vulnerable?
2. When talking to an acquaintance, can you tell if he/she are really listening to you? How do you feel when you know he/she is not?
3. Sometimes God, through his word, commands us to act in some area of our lives and we do not. When that happens, says James, we are like someone who "observes himself [in a mirror] and goes away and at once forgets what he was like" (James 1:24). Oftentimes, Christians will lament that "God isn't speaking to me anymore" only to discover that the real problem is we did not act on the last thing God told us to do, so He is waiting to speak until we obey the last thing he told us to do. What is the last practical thing the Holy Spirit told you to do?
4. Is there an area of your life that you find yourself repeatedly saying, "I really need to do something about that?" What do you think is keeping you from doing it?
5. How does society (TV, movies, magazines, and books) foster the idea that anger will achieved the desired goal in one's life?
6. Last week we studied the subject of trials and temptations. Why are we particularly susceptible to anger when faced with trials?





Questions for Reflection

Catholic Scripture Study

1. James 1:19 tells us to be "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Likewise St. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 2:24-25 that "the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness." He also demands of us that we "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4: 15). As Catholics, we often encounter people with false and even ugly notions of what the Church teaches. What are some concrete, practical ways we can respond to such notions in truthful love? How can we work to make sure we distinguish between a legitimate desire to rebut false ideas and the illegitimate desire to strike back at those who attack what we love?
2. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 1765) tells us, "There are many passions. The most fundamental passion is love, aroused by the attraction of the good. Love causes a desire for the absent good and the hope of obtaining it; this movement finds completion in the pleasure and joy of the good possessed. The apprehension of evil causes hatred, aversion, and fear of the impending evil; this movement ends in sadness at some present evil, or in the anger that resists it." In other words, true love can experience holy anger (as our Lord did when he drove out the moneychangers) which moves us to act against evil so that what we love may be protected. But anger that is disconnected from true love of the good can become a sort of cancer that simply enjoys fighting and destroying. This is the "anger of man" James speaks of. How can we "be angry and sin not" as Paul tells the Ephesians?
3. James says to "receive with meekness the implanted word" (James 1:21). Many people confuse "meekness" with being a wimpy doormat. Jesus described himself as "meek and lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29), yet He was no doormat but the "lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). Meekness (Gr: praotes) is the inner disposition that accepts God's dealings with us as good. As a consequence, the meek person is easily taught because they do not dispute or resist God. With this understanding, what is the difference between meekness and wimpiness?
4. James 1:22 says that if we hear the word but don't do it we are deceiving ourselves. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 2447) gives us the classic summary of what "doing the word" looks like in its discussion of the "spiritual and corporal works of mercy." It says: "The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God." What spiritual and/or corporal works of mercy are within your grasp right now? What concrete steps can you take today toward accomplishing one of them?
5. Read Matthew 7:24-27. Jesus speaks of two men, one wise and one foolish. What is the difference between the two of them in terms of how they deal with the storms of life? In relationship to trials, when is the time to act on the word of God?
6. James 1:25 tells us that, "the doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing." As Catholic, of course, we believe that we cannot earn the initial grace of justification from God. He comes to us out of love, we don't work our way to his forgiveness by being good enough.. But once we have received the life of God through baptism, it remains the case that we can be "blessed in our doing" those things that God, by his own power, has inspired and enabled us to do. The reality that God "blesses his children in their doing" is what Catholic theology refers to as "merit" and is also what St. Paul means when he tells us (Galatians 6:8), "He who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap





Questions for Reflection (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

eternal life." It is a response to grace, but it is also something we really do. Can you name a time God graciously called you to do something, empowered you to do it, and then "blessed you in your doing"?

7. The Kingdom of God is where Jesus, the King, is ruling and reigning. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 546) tells us that to know the secrets of the Kingdom, words are not enough; something else is required. What is this "something else" the Church speaks of?

8. James 1:27 counsels us to "keep oneself unstained from the world." St. John tells us that the love of the world consists of "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes in the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Writer Frederick Buechner defines lust as "a craving for salt in a man dying of thirst." In this, he reflects Catholic teaching which understands sin to be not a desire for something intrinsically evil but a disordered desire for something good. Neither sexual desire nor the love of beauty are themselves bad. But they become sinful when we desire them more than we desire the love of God and neighbor. Likewise, the love of self is not evil: it only becomes so when we love ourselves more than God and neighbor. Then it is no longer in obedience to the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" but is rather the "pride of life" St. John warns against. Given all this, how do we "keep ourselves unstained from the world"?

9. Is there a saint or other figure in the Church you look to as your role model for a "doer of the word"? Who and why?

10. James 1:19 says, "Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." How can this verse affect the way your Bible study group interacts with one another?

11. Discuss the Catechism Connection as it relates to the subject of this study.



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

James' View of the Word of God

Living as we do in a Protestant or, more accurately, post-Protestant culture, many people still assume that the "word of God" is coterminous with Scripture. In Scripture itself however, the "word of God" has several meanings. Supremely, the "Word of God" refers first and foremost not to a book, but a person: Jesus Christ (John 1:1). Subsidiary to this, the word of God can include things such as a) the preaching of Christ (such as the Sermon on the Mount); b) the Spirit-inspired apostolic preaching about Christ which was typically oral and occasionally written (preserved as what we call the New Testament documents) (2 Thessalonians 2:15); c) the Spirit-inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament; or d) even the utterance by which God creates from nothing. (Genesis 1:3-31).

Given such a rich, living and multi-layered understanding of what constitutes the word of God, it is not surprising to hear James speak of the word in similar terms. For him, "the word" is not just sound waves or ink and paper: it is a kind of seed of the Holy Spirit "implanted" within us and "able to save your souls" by the power of God (James 1:21). In other words, "the word" of the apostles, whether spoken or written, is sacramental. By such spoken or written words of human beings, God himself communicates his life, truth, and power to human souls. In the same way, the Catholic Church today teaches that since "everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (Dei Verbum 11).





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

Similarly, inspired Scripture, like Christ, not only reveals God to us, it reveals us to ourselves. Thus, the other image James uses to describe the word is that of a mirror (James 1:23-24). For James, as for the Catholic Church, it is useless to merely let the word bounce off our eardrums or eyeballs without receiving it into our hearts and enacting it with our arms and legs. To do so, says James, is to see our face in a mirror and forget what we look like. It is to forget who we are: sons and daughters of God himself according to his own word.

Meekness

James twice speaks of "meekness". We are, he says, to "receive with meekness the implanted word" and "show his works in the meekness of wisdom" (James 1:21; 3:13). Meekness is a term much misunderstood by modern speakers of English. Generally, it brings to mind a sort of watery and ineffectual niceness. We think of "meek" people as those with damp hands and limp hair, who constantly go about apologizing for their existence. Yet Jesus, who was, according to his own description of himself, "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29) does not fit such a wimpy description. For the true picture of meekness is not that of a doormat, but of a lion with its claws sheathed. Jesus was meek and lowly, not because he was a wimp, but because he was supremely confident of his relationship with God. He had nothing to prove and could therefore be gentle and take the lowest place. We too are to be meek, knowing that by grace we are children of God according to God's own word. We too can take the lowest place, not in wimpiness, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Law of Freedom

James 1:25 speaks of "the law of freedom". The law of freedom is the antidote to a prevalent modern philosophy that distorts our conception of law badly. We tend to think that when authorities pass laws, our freedom is necessarily curtailed. In other words, we believe law is the opposite of freedom. But back in the golden age of Christendom, when St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure taught Europe to think, everybody recognized the law comes from a lawgiver who is our Father. It was understood that if God is our Father then he not only knows us better than we know ourselves, he loves us better than we are able to love ourselves, and knows better than we know what we need to be happy, fulfilled, and perfected. That is why he gave us law. And since the God who gives us the law is the God who is the author of our freedom, it cannot be the law and freedom are opposed. Indeed, without the law of God we cannot be free. Of course, as Paul reminds us, the law without the Holy Spirit can't do anything for us. It is only with the Holy Spirit that the law liberates us. Likewise, the Holy Spirit never operates without this holy law because it is through the law that the Holy Spirit makes us holy.

Catechism Connection

Referenced from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

No. 2259 "Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin..."

No. 2011 "Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and men."

No. 143 The human response to God, the author of revelation is called "the obedience of faith."

No. 2208 "The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor."





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Family Devotions

One of the great devotions available to the clergy and laity alike (CCC No. 1174-1175) is the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Breviary. As a prayer-book, the Breviary is like a library in itself containing psalms of praise and petition along with readings from the lives of the great patriarchs such as Abraham and prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. Readings from the New Testament, particularly the life of Christ are abundant. There are a couple of advantages to reading God's word in the Breviary: 1) the word of God is read against the backdrop of the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year, helping the reader synthesis the scripture themes with the seasons of the Church. 2), the Breviary helps the student of Scripture through the explanation of biblical texts by the great doctors of the Church, such as Saint Jerome, Saint Augustine and Saint John Chrysostom. The Breviary is available at most Catholic bookstores.

Rome to Home

A papal quote relating to the lesson:

“Where can we find what God has revealed, so that we may adhere to it with our convinced and free faith? There is a ‘sacred deposit,’ from which the Church draws and communicates its contents to us.

As the Second Vatican Council says: ‘This sacred Tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see him as he is, face to face (cf. 1 John 3:2)’” (DV 7).
(General audience of 4/24/85) Pope John Paul II.





In this lesson, we observed that:

In this lesson we see that putting God's word into practice is key both in dealing with trials, and being made complete as sons and daughters of God. The Church teaches us that the proper response to hearing the word of God is to completely submit our intellect and wills to God. With our whole being we are to give assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, "the obedience of faith." "To obey (from the Latin ob-audire, to 'hear or listen') in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself" (CCC No. 143). In the Old Testament, Moses spoke to Israel and said "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." This statement, known as the Shema is in the same line of thinking as James. To hear the word is to do the word. The Virgin Mary is the most perfect embodiment of this truth. Mary welcomed the promises brought by the angel Gabriel with her assent: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word" (Luke 1:37-38).

In Mark 4:3-20 Jesus explains how the sower sows the word but through trials, persecutions, cares of the world and love of riches, the enemy steals the seed. Isn't it interesting that on the way to and from Mass we are more susceptible to anger and disputes? Be on guard and protect the seed you will receive in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. On the way to Mass assign members of your family the task of remembering one of the three Scripture readings. On the way home discuss how the three compliment one another and how you can put the truths into practice.

A Message from the Authors

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God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

