



James

Judging & Partiality

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

The first chapter of James ended by telling us to keep ourselves unstained by the world. One way we can be stained is by showing partiality -- allowing wealth, status or beauty to be the motivating factor in our relationships with others. Many of the Christians mentioned in the letter of James were themselves poor, but still they were not exempt from showing special favor to the rich. When Christians show partiality to certain people, the Church inaccurately communicates the heart of God. Indeed, choosing the recipients of the Gospel based on social or economic criteria frustrates the Church's evangelization efforts.

While the good news is for everyone, the Gospel has found a particularly receptive heart among the common man and poor. The poor are drawn like a magnet to Jesus in part because they have so much to gain, while the rich must give up so much. In reality, many of us live by the saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know." But we make the mistake of thinking that being associated with the "so-called" rich and successful will be a means to our provision and sense of well-being. However, St. Paul reminds us that we have come to know God, but he reminds us that the emphasis is that we are "known by God" (Galatians 4:9). James reminds us that in our relationships with others we must always remember to fulfill the royal law--that is to "love your neighbor as yourself."



James 2:1-13

1 My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren. Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you, is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme that honorable name which was invoked over you? 8 If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well. 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," said also, "Do not kill." If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment.





Catholic Scripture Study



Questions on the Text

Have you ever...

1. Have you ever been discriminated against?
2. Have you ever made an external judgement about someone, only to find out later that you were completely wrong?
3. Have you ever wanted to be more like Mother Teresa? ☐

Homework

1. Have you ever treated a person nonchalantly until you learned of their respected position in society, and then treated them with great dignity?
2. What are some of the ways we "pay attention" to the rich in our culture?
3. How does society determine the value or worth of a human being?
4. Why is it that we find ourselves wanting to be associated with the rich and successful rather than the poor and struggling? What does your answer say about your relationship with Christ?
5. What is the relationship between the way you view yourself and the way you treat others? How does Christ give you a proper view of yourself?
6. Gaudium et Spes, a document from Vatican II says, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." What does this teaching say about the relationship between the world and the Church? What does it mean to you in terms of your identification with those you pass on the street or at the office everyday?



Questions for Reflection

1. Mother Teresa said, "I think that the work of the Church in this developed and rich Western Hemisphere is more difficult than in Calcutta, South Yemen, or other areas where the needs of the people are reduced to the clothes needed to ward off the cold, or a dish of rice to curb their hunger - anything that will show them that someone loves them. In the West, the problems the people have go much deeper; the problems are in the depths of their hearts." Many financially stable people are emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually poor. How might a disciple of Jesus seek to give without expectation of repayment to such people? What types of inner poverty might we be tempted to show partiality toward or turn a deaf ear to?
2. Deuteronomy 15:7-10 "If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. 9 Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and it be sin in you.





Questions for Reflection (cont.)

Catholic Scripture Study

10 You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake." The term "eye be hostile" is a Hebrew idiom meaning a stingy or miserly attitude [See Proverbs 28:22; Matt 6:19-34]. The Lord warned Israel about justifying a stingy heart simply because release (The Jubilee) for the poor was near. In what ways do Christians today justify not helping the poor by claiming relief from some other source is near?

3. In Matthew 19:16-23 The rich young ruler had great difficulty with what Jesus said to do. What was the rich young ruler willing to do and what was he unwilling to do? Does your life differ from the rich young ruler or is it similar?

4. James 2:1 warns against partiality and prejudice against the poor. Moreover, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 2448), "In its various forms - material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death - human misery is the obvious sign of the inherited condition of frailty and need for salvation in which man finds himself as a consequence of original sin. This misery elicited the compassion of Christ the Savior, who willingly took it upon himself and identified himself with the least of his brethren. Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere." What is a specific step you can take toward "exalting those of low degree" as our Lord does (Luke 1:52)?

5. James 2:5 tells us, "God has chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith." What is a concrete, specific way that you can take a step away from reliance on worldly goods and toward reliance upon God so that you to may share in the blessings God gives to the poor?

6. James 2:6-7 makes note of the weird psychological fact that many of us tend to admire our oppressors. The rich man who gets the good seats at church, says James, are often the ones who "oppress you ... drag you into court... [and] blaspheme the honorable name which was invoked over you." In the same way, modern media such as movie studios, television networks and newspapers are often what G. K. Chesterton called "the play things of a few rich men" yet we mysteriously go on patronizing them uncritically even when they blaspheme God, insult and lie about the church, and ridicule the gospel as a "religion for losers." What steps might be taken to encourage what is good in the media, reject what is bad, and direct the money we waste on bad media offerings toward the service of the poor?

7. James speaks not merely of not discriminating against the poor, but of "honoring" them (James 2:6). What action can you take to honor the poor?

8. James 2:10 says, "Whoever keeps the whole law that fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." This does not mean that "all sin is equal" since Jesus himself clearly distinguishes between greater and lesser sin (Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11). Rather, it means that all sin constitutes an offense against God. What steps can we take to keep ourselves accountable so that we do not delude ourselves that some favorite -- and dangerous -- sin is "not that big a deal"? Conversely, how do we anchor ourselves in the life of the church so that we do not inflate scruples over venial sins into a temptation to despair?





Catholic Scripture Study



Questions for Reflection (cont.)

9. Temptation always enters the life of the Christian in pairs. One pair of temptations is to a) think we can get God to love us by obeying enough rules and b) think we can sponge off God's love and ignore all rules. The first temptation is called "legalism" and the second is called "antinomianism." James 2:12, in contrast, tells us to "speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty." In other words, God's law ensures liberty, not infringes upon it. Can you think of examples of when your obedience to God's will has been life-giving and freeing?

10. James 2:13 tells us, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." Everyone can think of somebody in their life they would like to see receive more judgment and less mercy. But both Jesus (in the parable of the unmerciful servant [Matthew 18:23-35]) and James tell us that "judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13). Neither James nor Jesus implied by this that mercy means pretending the one who hurt us did not do anything wrong. Rather, both James and Jesus are fully aware that mercy is for people who don't deserve it. What step can we take today to show mercy toward one who has hurt us so that we too may receive God's abundant and undeserved mercy?



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

Royal Law

James speaks twice of a law that sets us free: the "law of liberty" (1:25; 2:12) which he also calls the "royal law" (2:8). What is a royal law? A royal law is law promulgated by a king. James' point is that we cannot claim Jesus as our Savior without acknowledging Jesus as our King. And we cannot call him king without submitting to his reign. Therefore, obeying the royal law -- that is, the law of liberty that sets us free -- necessarily means performing works that our faith in Jesus demands. James then teaches, not that being a Christian frees us from moral responsibility, but rather that Jesus frees us to do the good things he commands of us so that we may have a share in his life of kingly freedom and power in the Holy Spirit.

Catholic Teaching on Our Attitude to the Poor

A focus of both James' and Jesus' teaching is the poor. Of course, the basic equality of all human beings before God is a fundamental Christian teaching. When it comes to the offer of salvation "God shows no partiality," as St. Peter tells us in Acts 10:34. But many people, under the absolute domination of our modern American egalitarian mindset, assume "equality" to be the highest good the gospel can conceive of. In reality, however, neither James nor Jesus stop their thinking at mere "equality." God became man and died on the cross for us not out of "fairness" but out of love. This being so, God focuses his special love on those among us who have the least: the poor. Thus Jesus urges his disciples to proclaim the gospel to all, yet in a special way bids us to "invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed" (Luke 14:13-14). James urges us to do the same and tells us bluntly, "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" (James 1:27). The bottom line of the gospel, then, is love, not mere equality. And love seeks out those who need it most. If we are to be like Christ, we must do likewise. On the other hand, we are to do so with justice and not with a sort of quasi-Marxist attitude that poverty with sanctity and white-washes the sins of the poor person against God and neighbor. As Scripture says, "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor" (Lev. 19:15).





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Mercy and Judgment

Catholic Scripture Study

James commends us to the "royal law" by telling us to "love your neighbor as yourself" (James 2:8). But he then warns us against "partiality" and tells us that if we are not impartial in our love we are "convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:9). What does he mean? Partial to whom? Some people surmise he means "partial to the rich over the poor" given that he was dealing with economic and social injustice a few verses earlier. But another way of looking at James' comments here is to say he has moved on to discussing another form of partiality: namely "partiality to yourself." If we are to love our neighbor as ourselves we must love them, not as we love the poor or the downtrodden, but just as we love ourselves. But if we do not extend our neighbor the mercy God extends us for our sins, we exempt ourselves from that mercy too. Hence, if my neighbor sins in some way that I find offensive and I refuse to forgive him, I in effect say to God, "Please treat me like a special case when I sin, but allow the full weight of my condemnation to fall on my neighbor." In other words, we are asking God to be one God toward us and another god (one of our own making) toward the neighbor whom we wish to judge. This is a kind of idolatry (which is another form of lawbreaking) and the judgment we demand against our neighbor as a lawbreaker becomes, inexorably, a judgment we demand against ourselves as lawbreakers.

James, like Jesus in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23-35), warns us against the refusal to have mercy on our brother or sister-who owe us a puny debt-when we have been forgiven massive and unpayable debts by Jesus, who paid our entire debt of sin with his blood. He urges us to impartiality, not only in weighing the human dignity of the poor and the rich but in applying the riches of Christ's mercy to those who are not Me. His warning is the same as Christ's to those who refuse mercy for others: they shall, by that act, deny it to themselves as well. But by the same token, James' promise of hope is of the same order of magnitude as Christ's: to those willing to be channels of Christ's mercy, that same mercy shall grace their own lives as well. As James himself puts it: "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

This implies, among other things, more than mere "equality". For mercy is an extension of active love on behalf of another, not a mere blank space where condemnation used to be. To have mercy is not merely to bring the ledger of sins out of the red and mark the account at zero. It is not merely to say, "That guy is as bad as I am, so I better be afraid to judge him lest I get it in the neck too." Far more, it is to actively say of another person that they are as beloved of Christ and as much an object of his saving grace as we are. It is the recognition that God's mercy is extended, not merely to us, but through us: making us at once recipients of love for ourselves and agents of love for our neighbor and even our enemy. It is to see in an enemy what God sees in us, a human being whom God wishes to exalt in love for all eternity.

Catechism Connection

Referenced from the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

No. 2448 "Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of preferential love on the part of the Church."

No. 544 "Jesus identifies himself with the poor of every kind and makes active love toward them the condition for entering his kingdom."

No. 786 "For the Christian, 'to reign is to serve him,' particularly when serving 'the poor and the suffering, in whom the Church recognizes the image of her poor and suffering founder.'"

No. 1847 "To receive his mercy, we must admit our faults."





Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Family Devotions

"When a poor person dies of hunger, it has not happened because God did not take care of him or her. It has happened because neither you nor I wanted to give that person what he or she needed. We have refused to be instruments of love in the hands of God to give the poor a piece of bread, to offer them a dress with which to ward off the cold. It has happened because we did not recognize Christ when, once more, he appeared under the guise of pain, identified with a man numb from the cold, dying of hunger, when he came in a lonely human being, in a lost child in search of a home."

- Mother Teresa

"God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us." - St. Augustine

Rome to Home

A papal quote relating to the lesson:

"Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition. True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent."

Pope Paul VI, Gaudium et Spes No.29.





In this lesson, we observed that:

We see in this lesson that we are called to proclaim the Gospel without partiality. How can we communicate more effectively with others without being swayed by external influences? We can adopt the attitude that we have an audience of one, that being Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." When we see others as men and women created in the image of God and attach the dignity due those whom God loves we begin to see through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus never met a man or woman he did not love and he asks us to walk as he walked. This means that we show hospitality, acceptance and encouragement. With the eyes of Christ we must learn to look beyond the outward trappings and see the great value which Christ sees in every person. 1 Sam 15:6-7 "Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

This week, before leaving the house, pause for a moment and put on your spiritual glasses, ask Jesus to help you see the world the way he sees you.

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God Bless,

Scott, Jeff, Mark and Gayle

