

In today's epistle lesson St. James tells a similar idea as an introduction to a very important exhortation concerning how we are called to listen to the Word of God:

17 **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. James 1:17-21

Heaven is the origin of every good thing. Every good and perfect gift comes from above. Every "perfect", meaning mature—When Scripture speaks about perfection it speaks about the state of something which has achieved its maturity, the purpose for which it was designed has been fully attained.— It is whole, it is complete. Therefore every good gift in its maturity or perfection comes from the "Father of lights". What a beautiful name! how opposed to that other name of the "father of lies!"

God is light; God is Truth; God never changes. The Truth, therefore, never changes. The Good never changes.

In the world everything changes. Heraclitus was right in that observation. But, was wrong in supposing that this changing world is all that there is.

It is a great source of consolation to know that God and his will never changes. There is an absolute ground for truth: God and his Word, who never changes.

What he calls good is good for eternity. What he calls evil is wrong for eternity also. This is important for us for:

18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The Word of Truth makes us new creatures. God has given us the Word of truth, which like him never changes. In Christ we have a sure foundation by

which God will complete his will for our lives.

This means that while the world drowns in uncertainty, faithful believers in Christ find in him and through him a sure foundation for life, truth and everything good. The word of God is powerful to turn death into life, to transform us into that for which God designed us to be: Persons recreated in his perfect image.

Regardless of the many changes of this world we have a sure anchor for the soul in him; a fountain of living water producing life from within us. It is God's purpose to make his children the firstfruit of his new creation. The "firstfruit" in scripture is a sign of that which is the best; which may be offered as a special offering. That is what God wants everyone one of us to become, and that is the purpose for which he recreated us by his abiding Word of truth.

Knowing this truth; should have for us clear and definite implications for our conduct. Says Saint James.

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person **be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger**;

The fact that the word of God is truth and that it is active in our lives transforming us into Christ image, should be reflected in the way we listen, the way we speak and the way we respond to insults and disappointments.

First, be Quick to hear: Disposition to listen to others is not only a sign of love and respect towards others, but it is also a sign of humility. It is a sign that we recognize that we do not know everything, and that others may have something to teach us, and that we may learn something even from the youngest child.

This simple truth which used to be a basic tenet of polite society involves an absolutely necessary discipline for the spiritual life. The discipline of listening with attention.

Faith comes from hearing, receiving and obeying the word of Christ above every other word. (Rom. 10:17). God has spoken. We must listen. That is why we must be quick, or ready, to listen to Christ's word, to ponder it in our hearts, to allow it to take root in our minds and to rule our actions. We cannot call ourselves Christians if the word of Christ is not ruling our hearts.

So, we must be quick to listen, but also **"slow to speak"**

Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent. Proverbs 17:28

Even the fool appears to be wise if he holds his tongue!

This is true of all conversation. We live in times when everybody wants to make his voice stand over every other voice. It is a deafening shouting match where everybody talks while no one really listens.

But, in the spiritual life being slow to speak is even more important. For it means that our personal opinions have been left behind; they do not occupy the center stage of our lives. There has been a great revolution at the center of our beings. The center stage belongs to Christ alone, to his word alone. Otherwise we fall victims to the uncertainty of human opinion, of which we talked before; victims of the father of lies, victims of the fluctuating fads of the world.

We must realize that our fallen human nature is prone to fall victim to deceiving appearances. Therefore instead of

repeating and confirming our opinions, or the opinions of those around us; we should be like the disciples at the last supper asking: Lord, is it I, who would betray you? I am wrong in what I think is your truth? Is that which I think in conformity to your teaching and to that truth which you have revealed? This is a very important question.

"We should be slow to speak" means that we must be eager to remove from our conversation everything that is not Christ like, not worthy, everything that belongs to this world, everything that is not pleasing to God, and to put instead everything that is good and perfect and edifying. We should be careful to avoid unedifying conversation.

This requires great self control. As James would expound later in his letter concerning the danger of the ill use of the tongue, and its power to destroy, which here he anticipates, reminding us that:

20 for the **anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

Human indignation, human anger in response to an offense is not conducive to righteousness. How easy it is for us to speak evil, ungraceful, foolish words when we have been offended and angry! How much unnecessary hurt have come into the world, because we have been quick to speak and slow to listen. How many times have we regretted the words that we have spoken wishing that we could take them back, because they are still producing harm to others. Words can be painful and destructive, as they may be edifying and healing. We are responsible for our words, for the way in which we speak and the effect our words produce upon the lives of others.

Our Lord gave us a very different example, about how to respond when offended:

1 Peter 2: 21-23 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

James 1:21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

The key that opens the door to true life and certainty in this world is simply this: receive with meekness the Word which God has implanted.

Our Gospel lesson tells us how Jesus, the night of his betrayal, promised his disciples the Spirit of truth, who would remind them all the things he had taught and would also reveal the things to come.

The Spirit would convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:

These three spiritual principles summarize the work of conviction of the Holy Spirit for the world: **Sin:** The essence of sin is unbelief in Christ; **Righteousness:** The essence of righteousness is the ascended Christ, and in his absence his word reveals true righteousness; and **Judgment:** because the ruler of this world is being judged from the crucifixion to the present day, his evil lies and power have been overcome by Christ. What is right has been revealed, what is wrong has been denied therefore the devil has already been judged.

This special gift of revelation of the truth of God by his Spirit through his Word is the ground upon which the New Testament writings were established.

The apostles did not preach to the church their own opinions. They delivered the Word that God had delivered to them by Christ and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that the written documents of the early church are to us the same as the Old Testament prophetic writings were for the Old Testament church: The Word of God written.

God has given to his church a solid foundation in the written word. To it we must learn to listen first and above every other word, because only that word has been implanted by the Spirit of truth. It is the only word providing for us a sure ground for our faith.

If we want to overcome the confusion of the World we must make the Word of God the foundation of our lives and our faith; Because it is God's implanted the Word, sure and unchanging. Because it is the word of God, it is also powerful to produce the fruit of new life intended by God for his new creation.

Only God can order the unruly wills of sinful men. The affections of sinful men are bound towards sinful things. ie, We love sin and reject true righteousness. We need a transformation of our hearts and wills to overcome the changing world and love Christ who never changes, in whom alone there is true and everlasting joy. This transformation is the result of the Word of God ruling our hearts.

What is our part then? Our part is to receive the witness of the Spirit, to receive his Word with meekness.

God freely offers his heavenly bread to the hungry, and his heavenly drink to the thirsty, when we come in meekness of heart to ask him. He promised his Holy Spirit to all who would simply ask. People are confused because they do not ask. They do not ask because they do

not want to listen to what the Spirit has to say. They want their opinion to remain as king of the lives; but the Lord tells us: "Ask and you will receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it will be opened on to you."

Meekness is the quality of self-denial, which leads us to the humble reception, the attitude of him who listens with attention and gratitude. Not the self-assertive, Not the proud, not the rulers or the powerful but the meek shall inherit the earth. Therefore, above all our meekness must be shown in our willingness to seek, find and follow Christ and his Word of God.

As we come to the Lord's table this fourth Sunday after Easter, let us meekly ask the Lord to send his Spirit of truth into our hearts, to make us alive in him, that his Word may find fertile ground in our souls and we may bear the fruit which grows on to eternal life by faith in him. Amen.

Let us Pray

ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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Receiving the Word with Meekness 4th Sunday After Trinity James 1:17-21

"You cannot step twice into the same river." Is a teaching attributed to Heraclitus an obscure pre-socratic philosopher who made the changing nature of all things the foundation of his view of the universe. Everything, he taught, is in a state of continual flux, continual change, nothing is firm and therefore our grasp of reality, has no definite foundation and is no more than a fleeting illusion.

This view was rejected by other philosophers, like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle but, ironically, we have come full circle and today this uncertain perspective on things has become prevalent and a defining postulate of our current relativistic post modern world-view.

We live in uncertain times. Nobody is sure of anything. Nothing appears to be reliable, nothing sure; opinions are continually changing; many believe and teach contradictory things at the same time. People generally think that all religions are the same and that people will be saved as long as they are sincere in their belief, even when these may be wrong or untrue. Our culture is drowning in Heraclitus changing river, finding no sure ground upon which to take a step. There is no ground for Truth.

In our previous Sermon we considered the Mission of the Church in light of the Ascension. We noted how the ascended Christ gave gifts and ministers to the church in order that all its members may grow being transformed more and more into his image, the image of the perfect man; that we would not be like immature children thrown back and forth by the waves of false doctrines.