

Homily for 25th Sunday Year – Sept 19

Our Second Reading this weekend is from the Letter of St. James. There are two words that jump out today. They are; Wisdom, and Passions.

Wisdom:

The first part of this passage is a continuation of a few sentences that come right before. As a whole, it reads (3:13-18):

“Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show his works by a good life in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.”

And now we continue into today’s passage:

“Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.”

So True Wisdom, which is Wisdom from Above, is described as being the source of peace and mercy and truthfulness.

James contrasts this with disorder and conflict.

In the Catechism, Wisdom is described as a spiritual gift – so it needs to be sought after and asked for. It comes from God, which is another reason to turn to God daily. For in God, wisdom becomes available.

Wisdom is often called a combination of knowledge and experience. Wisdom as compared to knowledge, then, is the insight to use what we know and have for the right purposes. Godly Wisdom, then, is better than what we call “street smarts.” A person can use many techniques to get what they want, but Wisdom from Above pays attention to the other person’s needs and dignity. The Wisdom of the World is not True Wisdom.

In the words of Saint James we hear echoes of Our Lord when He says that “the tree is known by the fruit it produces.”

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Passions:

James then goes on to ask, “Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?”

Here he again sounds like Our Lord, who declares, “What defiles comes from within.” We just heard this three Sundays ago. (Mark 7:15)

This second half of our reading today from James describes the uselessness of sinning. The sin of Coveting? Doesn’t get what it wants. The sins of murder and envy? Produces nothing. Asking wrongly? Doesn’t receive.

In our reading today, Passions are considered problematic because the Passions being spoken of are directed toward the wrong goals.

As we just did for the word “Wisdom,” so also it is good to go over some of the varied meanings of Passions.

The Catechism states that the moral Passions are, “The emotions or dispositions which incline us to good or evil actions, such as love and hate, hope and fear, joy and sadness, and anger.”

“Passions” is another word for “desires” or “wants.” In our faith we are not encouraged to get rid of desires. Instead, we are to direct our desires on good things.

Saint James is today speaking of Passions as we might say “putting the cart before the horse.” In other words, letting our emotions tell us what to do. Instead, we should be developing correct desires so that our emotions are following the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. We are to be desiring, being passionate, for God.

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One more reminder about the word Passion.

The ancient meaning of the word “Passion” is “suffering.” It is still the word we use for Christ’s suffering – His Passion.

To be passionate about something – as many artists tell us – is to experience a pain for the desired outcome.

To be compassionate is to suffer with someone.

In this sense, we can see a pattern from the Gospel last week and this when Christ teaches about His coming suffering. It is His Passion, which He passionately desires out of His compassion for all of His creation.

Jesus desires us. And we find our fulfillment when we desire Him. I am reminded of Psalm Thirty-Seven, verse Four (37:4).

“Find your delight in the Lord who will grant you your heart’s desire.” And Matthew, at the Sermon on the Mount, “ask and you shall receive...” For nothing grants to us what we wish it to - except Christ. Because He is the one for whom our hearts are made.