

## Homily For Tuesday of the 6th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

### St Peter's 8:30am/7:00pm Masses - Feb 15, 2022

**James 1:12-18** "One's desire conceives, gives birth to sin which, when fully grown, gives birth to death."

**Psalm 94:12-19** "Happy are those whom you discipline."

**Mark 8:14-21** "Jesus said to them: Do you not yet understand?"

### Birth and Bread

#### Introduction

Yesterday, our weekday scriptures began a new book in the first reading, the Letter of James. It is chock full of dramatic, but also practical, wisdom about how to live the Christian faith. No one writes like James. His uncompromising advice for all Christians is combined today with Mark's telling of Jesus' frustration with the first disciples lack of understanding almost literally boiling over. If we consider both of these together, it is pretty much impossible to ignore the likelihood that the inspired scriptures are aimed directly at us right here in this physical, or virtual, place. If that wasn't enough, throw in the psalmist telling us to be happy when God disciplines us.

#### James

I would like to throw Jimmy in the stove ... That's what Martin Luther angrily said about the letter of James in the early Protestant movement. He hated the fact that the Church had infallibly declared this letter as part of the New Testament canon more than 1000 years earlier. To him, it spoke too much of the things the Christian should DO, and not enough about what Christ had already DONE. Of course, the Church does not see it that way. For us it is always both.

The reading of this letter started yesterday. Don't be discouraged by trials, James says. God allows them for your benefit, so count them as joy. The Word of God challenges us to think and act differently. The testing of your faith produces fruit that the world does not offer. Take on the divine mindset. Don't let the world shake you with every news cycle.

Still in Chapter One, today he takes this a step further. In God's nature, there is no evil. That would be a contradiction. Temptations are going to come, but not from God. Then, in a thought that would be very much at home if we were already in Lent, the question arises: So, where *does* sin come from? It begins as a desire in our hearts. I think we get that. It may be the devil who plants a temptation in us, or that temptation may be of our own making. What happens next is that we allow ourselves to dwell on the temptation, to be enticed by it. That's when it 'gives birth' to sin. The sin then grows up, fed by us until it becomes strong enough to cause our spiritual death.

If we feed our desires, we will eventually be enslaved. One commentator says you have to not feed those desires but strangle them. Then, feed the desire for God. Sounds like a good Lenten thought, but good any time.

## **Mark**

We get a lesson in metaphors in today's readings. That one was about how we give birth to sin. Jesus uses another one, the yeast or leaven in bread. It's exactly the same message. Can you just imagine how James himself heard Jesus use many metaphors in his conversations and in his teaching, especially the parables?

Here 'leaven' is used in the sense of a bad disposition. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees and the dissolute life of Herod were the leaven which was poisoning from within the dough of Israel. Jesus seeks to warn his disciples about these dangers, and to have them understand that they need a pure and simple heart to understand the kingdom of God.

But they don't get it, do they? This is not because they are stupid. In fact, the brilliant Pharisees don't get it either. Understanding Jesus is a matter of attitude and disposition, which won't come fully until the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives them a kind of math lesson. One can imagine him writing the numbers on a blackboard. How many baskets were left over when I fed the 5000? Twelve. That's right. But it's not math. That's the number of the tribes of Israel. Twelve means that Jesus will provide enough nourishment for everyone. Later the same thing applies to the Church under the spiritual guidance of the twelve Apostles.

Now how many baskets were left over when I fed the 4000? Seven. Good. Now what is seven? It's not the number after six and before eight. It's the number of creation. The bread that Jesus brings is for nourishing the new creation IN HIM.

Don't you get it? Can't you hear it. Don't you see it? I (Jesus) am the one who will fulfil everything that has been going on since the establishment of a people of God's own making. You forgot to bring your own bread? I will provide the bread from the sacrifice of my own body. You don't get that part yet but can't you see that I fed the people from almost nothing of your own providing?

### **Call To Action**

Have we forgotten that God provides not only enough, but abundance? Leaven is the hardening of the heart that prevents spiritual insight. True understanding is on the other side of the cross, which is why Mark's narrative moves inexorably there. Jesus is the one loaf for Jews and Gentiles. Just as James says, there is no evil leaven in the bread that he provides. That comes from our hard heartedness.

St. Ignatius of Antioch says, "Be changed into the new leaven, which is Jesus Christ." We must look at things with the eyes of God, not with the sinner man's eyes. The Kingdom of God expands in our World just as the yeast grows in the dough, without our always knowing why. Authentic faith must be like that, a faith that grows in our love for God. Let nothing and nobody confuse us. Our Lord never misses an opportunity to teach us.

Like the blind man, let us plead, "Lord, please let me see." Let us answer the Lord, "I believe. Help my unbelief." Let us also ask, "Lord, help my lack of understanding. Let us give birth, not to evil desires, but to the desire to see and the desire to hear. God bless everyone this day.

## **Key Passages**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Turn your eyes, O God, and look on the face of your anointed one.*

**Collect:** *O God, fill our hearts with the warmth of your love so that we may attain your promises, which surpass every human desire.*

**James:** *Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. No one, when tempted should say, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one's own desire. When that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.*

**Psalm:** *Happy are those whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, giving them respite from days of trouble.*

**Mark:** *Jesus cautioned them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod." They said to one another, "It is because we have no bread." Jesus said to them, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Do you have eyes and fail to see? Do you have ears, and fail to hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect? They said to him, "Twelve." And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then Jesus said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"*