

The Epistle of Saint James, Chapter 5 **“Spiritual Advice for the New Year”**

Introduction

1. Who is the author?
 - a. Saint James, the first bishop of Jerusalem
 - b. The “brother” of the Lord (kinsman)
 - c. Also known as Saint James the Just
 - d. He was known to be very ascetic and virtuous, being able to lead men to perfection in both theory and practice.
 - e. He found favor from the Jews for Saint James worshipped in the temple and obeyed the Law of Moses better than they. The Jews found no fault with him, except that he confessed our Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah.
 - f. He was martyred around 62 A.D. – thrown against the temple walls and then clubbed to death.

2. Major Theme
 - a. The harmony of faith and works – the works here are willed actions flowing from belief
 - b. He did not teach that we are saved based on our works alone, but teaches that a dead faith, one without works, does not save.

3. His Audience
 - a. Not to a specific church (this is considered a “Catholic Epistle”)
 - b. Saint James writes to people experiencing various trials: persecution, deception, economic injustice and poverty, apostasy, and divisions in the Church.
 - c. Saint James deals with:
 - i. Their depression over being snubbed and persecuted by the Jews
 - ii. Their anger at having their goodwill taken advantage of
 - iii. Their bitterness over being so poor when godless Jews were so rich
 - iv. Their impatience over the delay in the return of Jesus
 - v. Hypocrisy – the difference between profession and practice
 - d. As we will see in Chapter 5, Saint James reiterates and emphasizes those things spoken of by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel.

Four Goals for the New Year

1. Put away Material and Spiritual Corruption (James 5:1-6)
 - a. Saint James emphasizes the temporal nature of material riches
 - b. These rich are unjust, using their riches in a corrupt and stingy manner
 - i. Not only have they refused to share their wealth with the poor but they have gone so far as to refuse to pay their workers the wages due to them
 - c. The problem is that riches create a false sense of power and God cannot work in someone who does not think he needs Him
 - d. Consider who our Lord chose to be apostles (the rich? the powerful? the wise?)
 - e. Analogy of the mother teaching her child to write; or the sail that drives the boat
 - f. The important thing for us to remember is that we should not despair of the mercy of God. Even if we have been careless up until now in our spiritual lives, God has allowed us to pass another year and has given us another chance to repent and to grow in His name.

2. Endure with Patience (James 5:7-12)
 - a. We will certainly endure our share of troubles in the new year, but the important thing is to endure with patience
 - b. We are given the examples of saints and personalities from the bible and throughout Church history who endured and received a great blessing
 - c. The devil would like nothing more than to cause us to suffer in order for us to curse God, rather than to turn to Him
 - d. We have, in this passage, the example of Job; however, the Blessed Augustine instructs us, "Bear your temporal misfortunes as Job did, but do not hope for temporal goods as a reward for your patience, such as were returned to him double. Rather hope for the eternal goods which the Lord went before us to secure."
 - e. So even if the circumstances do not look good, let us trust in God and be patient until His full plan is revealed
 - i. Example of the painter on TV
 - f. Aside: The Oath and Swearing
 - i. The Lord expects that everything that we say is true and that there is no lie
 - ii. Therefore, we are called not to swear by anything at all, lest we appear to tell the truth only when we swear and lest we think it is all right to lie when we do not take an oath. Consider how Herod's oath landed him in trouble.

3. Participant in the Sacramental Life of the Church and Receive Power (James 5:13-18)
 - a. We are called to call on God in times of trouble and to praise Him in times of cheer (v. 13)
 - b. Here, the sacraments of the Unction of the Sick and Repentance/Confession are mentioned; and the two go hand in hand
 - c. We recall our physical and spiritual sickness – The Church opens her doors as a hospital to those who are sick and wish to receive healing
 - d. This teaches us that salvation involves the whole person
 - e. Confession of our sins is part of the unction of the sick (v. 15)
 - f. The sacraments are the way that we tap into the power of Christ perfected in His life-giving death and resurrection (Baptism, Holy Chrism, Confession, the Eucharist)
 - g. To simply gaze at the source of power without tapping into it is meaningless (analogy of staring at the waterfall which generates electricity or the electrical outlet)

4. Seek after the Lost and Restore them (James 5:19-20)
 - a. Once we see how the blessings of God pour over in our lives then naturally, we will want to share this same joy with others
 - b. The Lord taught that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents
 - c. The tear of a repentant is indeed precious in the eyes of the Lord
 - i. Story of the Lord sending an angel to recover the thing most precious in his sight (the blood of one who suffered for the faith; the breath of the nurse who died of an illness contracted through her patients; the tear of a repentant who resolved to sin no more)
 - d. We engage in this work out of love, and not for our own self-gain and recognition; with conversion comes responsibility and we need to sow the seeds and in as much as possible to foster conditions around the seed that will help it to grow (good soil, good weather, food, etc.).
 - e. But part of this work is also the response of the other. The important thing is to sow the seed indiscriminately and not worry how the other will respond. It may not be right away, but the fruits of this labor may come at a later time (consider Saint Paul and how he must have been affected in seeing Saint Stephen at the time of his martyrdom)

GLORY IS DUE TO OUR GOD UNTO THE AGE OF ALL AGES. AMEN.