

5.19.2019 Easter 4 (James 1:17)

*“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...”* (James 1:17). These inspired words written by St. James present us with the truth that there are two kinds of gifts that come from God: good gifts and perfect gifts. Our sermon hymn paints a vivid picture of some of the good gifts of which James speaks. “All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful, The Lord God made them all.” As dark and difficult as this world may often be, when we, as children of God, pause to consider *every good gift* that comes from our Father: flowers and birds, mountains and rivers, the sunset and the sunrise, the very capacity that God has given us to *“taste and see that the LORD is good”* (Psalm 34:8), when we consider these things what we quickly discover is that all of creation is a good gift that reveals the thoughts and proclaims the love of God our Father, and at the same time brings great happiness to His children.

For a moment, reflect on your own experience in gift giving and I believe you’ll agree that in creation we discover the very definition of a good gift. When we’re searching for a good gift for someone we love, what we always want to find is a gift that expresses the thoughts of our heart so well that the gift itself reveals our identity. A good gift doesn’t need a tag. When someone unwraps a good gift, they know exactly who it’s from. A good gift not only reveals the identity of the giver, it manifests their love. The one to whom a good gift is given is drawn into an experience in which they know that they are loved by the giver. Finally, a good gift brings a joyful happiness to whom the gift is given. The gifts of creation can most certainly be called good, for they accomplish these things. They reveal God as the Giver of every good gift, they proclaim His love in such a way that we are drawn to Him, and they bring with them the kind of joyful happiness that cannot be taken from His children.

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...* Have you ever noticed that the best things in the natural, created world come not from the lowest points, but from the highest places? The light and heat produced by the sun, which comes down to us from the heavens above, warms our planet and gives energy to the plants that provide the food and oxygen for life on earth. The

clouds above us cast cool shadows on hot summer days and drop the rain that refreshes the face of the earth. The mountains we look up to are the source of almost every major river, providing streams of water to quench our thirst and water our fields. When we look at the natural world we find that every good gift, all those things which make this world bright and beautiful and perfectly suited to be our home quite literally come to us from above. The ordinary, natural life of all creatures great and small is supported and enriched by the good gifts that come down in rays of light and heat, that fall down in drops of rain, and stream down in rivers of water.

These things that we witness everyday, these good gifts from above which we *taste and see* in this ordinary, natural life should lead us to contemplate every extra-ordinary, every super-natural, every perfect gift that is from above, for if our ordinary, natural life is supported and enriched by the good gifts which come from the mountains or heaven above, how much more is our true and everlasting life supported and enriched by the Perfect Gift that has come to us from the Highest of all Sources, the Maker of heaven and earth and the mountains.

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...* If we define a good gift as one that expresses the thoughts in the heart of the giver and declares their love, while at the same time bringing great happiness to the receiver, then how should we define a perfect gift? It seems that a perfect gift would be one which perfectly expresses the thoughts and fully declares the love of the Giver, while at the same time bringing to the receiver a joy that is full and complete, even to the point of overflowing (John 15:11). The most perfect of all gifts has come to us from above, and this Perfect Gift is the gift of God Himself. In His Son, in the Eternal Word of God made flesh (John 1:14), the Father has perfectly expressed the thoughts of His heart and revealed Himself as the Giver of every good gift and every perfect gift. Through His Son, through His one, full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, the Father has, in an infinite and unspeakable manner, fully declared His everlasting love for each and every one of us. By His Son, by giving the unimaginable gift of His Son, the Father has drawn us to Himself and filled our hearts with an inexpressible joy that no one can take from us (John 16:22). In God, through Christ, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we receive the Perfect Gift from above Who is a complete expression of God's everlasting, sacrificial love, and Who fills our

hearts and minds and lives with infinite, unspeakable joy.

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...* Everything we have in this world, from the smallest flower to the sun rising above the most majestic mountain, and everything we need for the next, from our first word of humble repentance to our Lord's Divine proclamation from the Cross that the work of our Redemption is complete: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30), everything we have and everything we need is a gift, a good and perfect gift from above. We couldn't buy it or make it, we didn't earn it and we don't deserve it, it is simply the will of our gracious Heavenly Father to give these gifts to the end that whoever receives them will be drawn to Him, will know His love, and will experience the joy of the Lord and the peace of God which passes understanding.

I leave you with this thought: The first chapter of Genesis begins with these words: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). In the context of today's sermon, perhaps we could say, "In the beginning God created every good gift," because in chapter one, which tells of God creating the heaven and the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, and every living creature, God's creation is described over and over again as good. Until finally, at the end of chapter one we're told that "*God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good*" (Genesis 1:31). All of creation, every good gift is packaged neatly into the first chapter of the Bible. This description of creation leaves a person with the impression that the good gifts God has given to us don't cost Him anything. The Omnipotent Creator of Heaven and Earth simply speaks His Word, and every good gift comes into existence.

Every good gift may cost God nothing, but the Perfect Gift, the Perfect Gift cost the Father the life of His beloved Son. The Perfect Gift cost the Son scandal and hatred, scourging and crucifixion. The Perfect Gift cost the Spirit, who is the bond of love that holds the Father and the Son together, more than our hearts and minds can even begin to fathom, for it was through the Spirit that the Son offered Himself to the Father (Hebrews 9:14). Only One God, in Three distinct Persons, could be the Giver of the Perfect Gift of Love. As we, by the grace of God, unite ourselves to Him this morning in Holy Communion, may we by faith with thanksgiving, receive His Perfect

Gift into our bodies, and with He in us and we in Him may our lives be a freely given, loving and sacrificial response to the Father of lights, the Giver of every good gift and every Perfect Gift.