

5.15.2022 Easter 4 (James 1:17-21)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke to His disciples about prayer, saying, *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”* (Matthew 7:7-11).

In these verses, our Lord is saying to us all: If you want to know the thoughts of God toward you, how He loves you, and how ready He is to give you every good thing, then consider your own experience with good parents. Whether that experience is being a good parent, being raised by one, or witnessing a good parent in action, we all know how much we do for our children, how ready we are to care for them in every way. We know how a good mom or dad will work and pray and sacrifice to provide for the needs of their children, to ensure their happiness, and to help their kids reach a far better place than they were ever able to reach themselves.

This is the heart of a good parent, it always has been, and here Jesus tells us God the Father is like that. He’s like a good dad, only infinitely better, for if we, who are so far from perfect, work hard, lose sleep, and deny ourselves so that we might raise happy, healthy, loving children, then *how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!* Jesus encourages us to take this truth to heart, the truth that even the best parent on this earth is merely a dim and distant reflection of our Father in heaven, a dim and distant reflection of how He cares for you, how He feels toward you, how God, who is love (1 John 4:8), loves His children.

God our Father is like a good dad, only infinitely better. In the Scripture we opened with today from the Sermon on the Mount, it was St. Matthew who recorded Jesus teaching at the beginning of His ministry about the Father giving good gifts to His children, and there’s a parallel passage found in Luke’s Gospel account that takes place later in our Lord’s ministry, a passage in which Jesus speaks about the Father giving not only good gifts, but the Perfect Gift. According to St. Luke, Jesus said, *“If you then, being evil, know*

*how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!*" (Luke 11:13).

In Matthew, Jesus tells us the Father gives "*good things,*" in Luke we're told the Father gives "*the Holy Spirit,*" and the striking difference we find in these parallel Gospel accounts should make us thankful that there is not one, but four canonical Gospels. It's true blessing to be able to read Matthew's account, which records Jesus teaching about God's infinite desire to *give good things to those who ask Him,* and then to read the words of Luke, who records Jesus speaking at another time in a definitive and specific way about the Perfect Gift, the Holy Spirit, the Gift which is the Source of every gift.

In the Epistle we read this morning, we heard from another one of the Apostles, St. James, and his words are a reflection of what we read in both Matthew and Luke. James wrote, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...*" (James 1:17). James, like Matthew, attributes every good gift to God, and James, like Luke, tells us the Perfect Gift comes from the Father (see also 1 Corinthians 12:4). His words, once again, lead us to consider the distinct difference between parents on earth and our Father in heaven. St. James presents us with the truth that unlike earthly parents, there are only two kinds of gifts that come from God: good gifts and perfect gifts. Out of the abundance of His grace and mercy, God blesses His children with *every good gift and every perfect gift,* because He is good and perfect. As you know a gift-giver can't give what they don't have, and therefore, God can only give to His children what's best for them. He has no other option, no other way of giving, for "*God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5). No sin. No wickedness. No imperfection. Not even a shadow of such things. None at all.

God our Father is like a good dad, only infinitely better. *Every good gift and every perfect gift* comes from Him, and as we turn our attention toward the Gospel reading this morning, all of these passages come together and we find a reason to believe that God can only give to His children what's best for them, a reason to believe that even in our darkest hour, God our Father is working all things together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28). The Gospel we read today is taken from a passage in which Jesus told His disciples they would be hated and persecuted, put out of the synagogues, "*In fact,*" Jesus said to them, "*a time is coming when anyone who kills you will*

*think he is offering a service to God*” (John 16:2). Our Lord described the dark and difficult future these men would face, and punctuated those remarks with this heartbreaking news: Jesus said, *“Now I am going to Him who sent Me”* (John 16:5).

Can you imagine the sense of fear, loss, and abandonment these men must’ve felt hearing those words? Our Lord told them they’d face hatred, persecution, and death, He told them He was leaving, and then Jesus said to them, *“I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you (it is for your good) that I go away...”* (John 16:7). People often criticize the disciples for failing to see, or perhaps refusing to admit, what Jesus clearly revealed to them concerning His Passion and Death, but honestly ask yourself, would we have done any better? After spending three years with our Lord witnessing the miraculous way He healed the sick, fed the multitudes, calmed the seas, and raised the dead with just one word, would we have believed He would freely choose the shame of the Cross (Hebrews 12:2) as the way to His glorious victory?

Clearly, God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8). No doubt, at that dark and painful moment, the disciples would’ve preferred for Jesus to remain with them, but He said, it is for your good *“that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you”* (John 16:7). By going away, by His blessed passion and precious death, His mighty resurrection and glorious ascension, Jesus sent *the Comforter*. *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above*, and the Father, through the Son, gave the *Perfect Gift* of God Himself - His Holy Spirit, that He may dwell in us and we in Him.

God can only give to His children what’s best for them. He has no other no option, nothing else to give than that which is good and perfect, but did the Apostles recognize that truth in the midst of their sorrow? Did their broken hearts understand that their Lord’s departure was for their good? Certainly not in that moment. After His death the disciples were filled with sorrow, they hid in fear (John 20:19), and it wasn’t until His Resurrection, Ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost that they would begin to understand His words, *“It is for your good that I am going away”* (John 16:7 NIV) In other words, *“It is for your good that I endure the sorrow,*

suffering, and shameful death of the Cross.”

Everything God our Father gives to His children, and everything He does for His children, is either good or perfect. From our limited perspective that eternal truth is not always easy to see, but when we consider the example of the saints who've gone before us, the promises of Holy Scripture, and the historical fulfillment of those promises, we can rest in the blessed assurance that even in our darkest hour God our Father has a plan, and His plan is good and perfect (James 1:17). His plan is to give us a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). His plan is to do infinitely better things for us than we could ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). *How much more* will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him? Look to the Cross and see.