

## 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Yr. B

Over the past few weeks we've focused on the second readings from the Letter of James. We've seen his exhortations, addressed to the Jewish Christian churches of the diaspora (dispersion), are mainly concerned with practical ways of right ethical conduct before God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Jas 1:1) Based on his understanding of salvation involving conversion, baptism, forgiveness of sin, and expectation of judgement (1:17; 4:12), James emphasizes sound teaching and responsible moral behaviour grounded in both faith and works. We, in our own time, are nonetheless stewards answerable to God in all our dealings with our brothers and sisters. Where God's concerns are to be found so must ours be found; since we are People of God we ought to act as such.



Today's reading (Jas 5:1-6) contains a severe, blunt warning to the rich. We, in Australia, with our high standards of living may feel uncomfortable with it – which is not necessarily a bad thing so long as we place James in the context of his time, and that he knew well what Jesus had bluntly said on the subject: 'Yes, I tell you again, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of Heaven.' When the disciples heard this they were astonished. 'Who can be saved, then?' they said. (We need keep in mind what immediately follows) 'By human resources', he told them, 'this is impossible; for God everything is possible.' (Mt 19:24-26) Still we need to sit up and take notice, since material riches can easily lead to a distortion of conscience and spiritual poverty if one is not careful.

We are strongly warned against coveting wealth, hoarding earthly riches, oppression and injustice of every kind against the weak, the poor, the disadvantaged. What is the point to senselessly hoarding wealth for oneself in this life while ignoring the underprivileged? For the Lord hears the cry of the poor; then comes the final judgement of God! (CCC 675-77, 1867, 2446) It is among the spiritual works of mercy to warn such people e.g., by referring them to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). Otherwise we can sin by omission. (Jas 5:19-20)

James is not speaking of riches in the **literal** sense, for certainly not every rich person loses eternal life; it is rather greedy, selfish attitudes towards riches that cause problems. Just as in today's Gospel Jesus is not speaking **literally** of plucking out eyes and cutting off hands and feet, but to make it amply clear that living the virtuous life is to be taken seriously and requires strict measures – better for you to enter into life crippled, than to have two hands and go to hell, into the fire that can never be put out. (Mk 9:43-47) (CCC 1034, 1056-1057, 1861) Jesus teaches that we are invited to follow God **in all things** since nothing will count in the end except faithfulness to the Lord God. What's the point in stockpiling wealth, possessions, being exploitative, seeking fame, or other things in this life as none of those will bring us into the presences of God; for which we need God's **grace**.

Yet, in so many ways don't we all at times try to justify ourselves? We want that something better to make us look good in comparison with others by having not just enough but more than enough! Better that we follow Jesus ~ '*If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross every day and follow me*' (Lk 9:23), and '*How blessed are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of Heaven is theirs*' (Mt 5:3). The poor in spirit are those who hear the Word of God in humility **and live it** – even while in the midst of suffering; comforted by the knowledge they are on the path to eternal life, offering up those sufferings

to God. (CCC 544, 1716, 2546) As in today's Psalm ... 'who can detect his own failings? Wash away my hidden faults.' (19:12)

Moreover, if such behaviour extends to **deliberately** robbing the poor for profit, paying unjust wages, even murdering those who stand in their way then, when the end comes *Gehenna* is their lot for they will have nothing of value in the spiritual sense; not only have they ignored the natural law, they have not lived in self-giving charity – i.e., love in the biblical sense. It doesn't make sense to make earthly treasure one's final goal in life. The Church views 'love' as coming from the Greek word *agape* which gives a distinctly Christian understanding of love i.e., charity. (CCC 1694, 1829) "Love of neighbour ... consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God ... Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ." (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* #18) Christ died for the whole world i.e., **for every person** not just a select few (CCC 1037) – such as is found in the heresy of Jansenism.

In his Apostolic Letter, *Candor Lucis Aeternae*, on the seventh centenary of the death of Dante Alighieri, Pope Francis poses timely questions about Dante's great work (The Divine Comedy) as it 'has an important message to convey, one meant to touch our hearts and minds, to transform and change us even now ... that can and should make us appreciate fully who we are and the meaning of our daily struggles to achieve happiness, fulfilment and our ultimate end, our true homeland, where we will be in full communion with God, infinite and eternal Love.' (#9) <https://bit.ly/399utWf>

**MOA**