

Doing it My Way.

The temptation to make God in our image and likeness

Yesterday the Liturgy began a two week visit to the Letter of James who will be with us until the end of the month. James is one of the earliest writings of the New Testament, even before the Gospels. One is struck with the many rich-laden passages of divine wisdom found in these few pages. The balance, finesse, conciseness and conviction in its lines liken it to a New Testament book of Proverbs. Commentators over the centuries have alluded to the letter's similarity to the Beatitudes as well. Throughout we find keen moral analogies, such as looking at oneself in a mirror in making a connection with people and then quickly turning away, or comparing what one wagging tongue can do to a spark setting off a forest fire ; or to the rich: "*you have lived on earth in luxury and pleasure, you have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter*" - in general the writing is straightforward, accounting for upright moral living against the backdrop of a loving God who he addresses today The Father of Lights.

Today's short passage from James deals with temptation, and he rightly makes clear: temptations do not come from God, ever, but He often tolerates them to grow through trial, even little prickly ones. But don't blame the *temptation* on God... How subtle that blaming can play out in our lives! For example, when "something goes wrong." That's not exactly what we associate with a temptation, is it? But the temptation might be to become angry at circumstances beyond our control. The weather? The traffic? The stock market? The doctor's grim diagnosis? The loss of job. And then the anger directed at God. That's misplaced anger, a knot of anger, seemingly non-directive. When circumstances are beyond my con-

trol we call God into play. But lingering on how it is something else. But why isn't it working out the way I want it? I don't deserve this!

Let's get into this a bit further. God doesn't tempt us. In fact He plants enough awareness called conscience to recognize the right course of action. All right. So where do the temptations arise? Well to start, it isn't usually from the red guy with the pitch fork. The Church traditionally has taught that after the Fall in Genesis, besides heaven being closed off until a savior came, humans were also weakened in making judgments in relation to God's plan and reason; yet strengthened in desire for what is pleasurable and resistant to what is painful . At first that might sound quite reasonable, and in so many cases it is. But the catch is that what guides us in those points is "the pleasure principle" and the "avoid pain" principle. It translates into slogans like: "If you like it, do it," or in a prideful vacuum apart from other people's interest: "I did it my way" enters far darker realms than what Frank Sinatra was singing about in that otherwise classic song. Next it becomes: "you can't tell me what to do" . Or "hey, everybody does it" and "It's OK if you just don't get caught." Morality then becomes reduced to whether one is clever or dull minded. ***And not in responding to the gifts of human reason and free will.*** Yes, all temptation comes from a ***disordered disposition***, which we inherited as part of the phenomenon called Original Sin, not from God's ***capriciousness***. - the way the ancient pagans thought. Their gods come and trick you, or say one thing and do another. One thing we learn from the Old Testament is that the Hebrew God doesn't do that. Oh yes, the psalms are filled with honest heart-wrenching fears and grief even over what ***seems*** to be God abandoning them - Jesus Himself experienced that abandonment on the Cross when with God was most needed - yet the core of covenant uniqueness is the LOYALTY of God ***despite*** the DISOBEDIENCE of his loved creatures who caved in to temptation and sinned.

James goes on to describe something stirring up from within us: **“Each person is tempted when lured and enticed by his desire.”** Notice the words **“lured”** **“enticed.”** The “desire” comes from **disorder** based not on reason and will, but the pleasure principle, which often runs afoul. Over-eating, shop-lifting and free sex are but examples where the pleasure principle substituted for what is right and wrong in different areas.

Later on in the Letter James will makes this assessment ***“Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members?”*** Passions here refer not to energy but the distorted desires of the heart: ***Doing it my way*** might contribute unique talent in the world of sports, media or the arts. Such diversity can work up into excellence as well. But when **disordered** desires become the driving point behind corporate greed or personal vendettas, when just plain killing to protect one’s convenience or to avoid pain at the cost of another’s life or grave misfortune, an ugly monster sprouts up.

Notice how today’s excerpt from James uses **pre-born** figures. ***“Desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death.”*** Look at the sheer tragedy of that sentence, ***“giving birth to death”*** as the climax of bad desires is the very essence of the culture of death that drives so much today. James warns us with the terms of **pre-born development** : such as **– conception – bringing forth – giving birth** but in direct opposition to what virtue should bring: **new life, new world to explore, new impossible dreams to conquer.** And bam, this vicious process generates to the point of giving birth to death. Temptation brings this.

But doesn’t that description fit the bill of our world laden by rampant **con-traception** and **abortion** ? What seems like a quick fix for a problem - **abortion** – in other words to avoid pain or burden, afterwards becomes a

protracted problem of grieving caused by the taking of innocent life. It's like *birthing death*, to as James would say. Though Let me be clear: to anyone who has had the unfortunate experience of a stillborn or miscarriage, I'm not talking about that sorry event here. Now you should know that your babies are eternally saved and powerful intercessors for those who still grieve. I express along with the Church a heartfelt compassion for your loss. But I'm relating here to something else which James has underway in his analogy. A civilization that operates through the lens of the *pleasure principle* and ignores God's plan for our happiness and well-being, that society "gives birth to death." Add to this the pressure of governments, courts and media which re-enforce self-autonomy under the pleasure principle fostering further disposition to spiritual death. True, abortion and contraception are two different things. And for the sake of many viewers who hear these two words often lumped together in the secular media as a supposed hang-up the Church can't get over, though different they are not entirely unrelated. *Abortion kills outright, contraception prevents the completion of the purpose* for which the gift of sex was given, namely, new life, a unique child. Genesis makes it clear from the first command given our first parents: "Reproduce and multiply." On a societal level nothing is more vital. Or negatively, more final

After all God wanted us to bring about and enjoy greater fulfillment than momentary pleasure. But *in marriage* - where the proper end of procreation, "to increase and multiply" as Genesis tells us, before the fall, is assured. *Just as the appetite and pleasure for food is at the service of a balanced diet to nurture life, so is the proper use of the gift of sex in marriage as the basic unit of society to co-create and foster the human race along with the Creator.*

Actions have consequences. The present slowing worldwide rate of population growth may seem desirable to some who misguidedly promote mass

population control as a source of human betterment; but in fact we are seeing declining rates due to contraception and in some cases nations are in demographic crisis not for over-population but under-population. The crisis is such that even now some nations are waking up and at times actually financially rewarding couples to be fruitful . This crisis is one that is brought about by rampant contraception and what follows when contraceptives fail – induced abortion. Actions do have consequences.

Pope Francis points out repeatedly that we have become a throwaway society. Scandalously, the rich nations are coping with obesity and third world is scrounging for food. Listen to what he says both for unborn, and elderly: both are thrown away.

“Every child who, rather than being born, is condemned unjustly to being aborted, bears the face of Jesus Christ, bears the face of the Lord, who even before he was born, and then just after birth, experienced the world’s rejection. ... And every elderly person, even if he is ill or at the end of his days, bears the face of Christ. They cannot be discarded, as the “throwaway culture” suggests! They cannot be thrown away! ...”

The temptation to throwaway the child is not just a bad dream; it has become a reality to the tune of well over a million a year just in the US. Amidst all of this let’s stand up with a positive appetite for fostering life and the beautiful gift of self-controlled chastity! Let’s also encourage those who are struggling! But there is a great difference between those who know God’s plan and want to follow it, and others who simply dismiss it for the pleasure principle or for self-autonomy.

Still there is further sense of throwing away found in the contraceptive mentality: Not just throwing away the gift of fertility that is cut off by contraceptive means. Fertility is after all not a disease to be cured by a “pill” or “condom” and should not be in any insurance as “health care.” As Church we need to address this head on despite the barrage of media propping it up as a

needed way of life. Until 1930 every Christian Church condemned contraception and understood its evil. has taken it upon itself however to mastermind the details of life according to one's own or a couple's own revised plan. That too is a more dangerous ***throwing away*** the very plan of God for sexuality.

If we are truly believers, we can't attempt to re-route God's plan using our own map in redrawn detours. Some detours are dead ends. **Contraception** is one of them. **Abortion** is another. **Same sex activity** is another, and courts and legislatures endorsing this phenomenon as a marriage shows how far God's plan has been manipulated. As the sad expression goes: "God made man in HIS Image and likeness; and man returned the compliment."

Another look at James' expression: ... ***desire conceiving and bringing forth sin and sin reaching maturity gives birth to death.*** How unfortunate this sounds and yet I can't help but conclude that the growing suicides among our teens and the killings rampant in our cities not for revenge, which would be bad enough, but often for the chilling and perverse satisfaction of killing a helpless stranger, these poisonous fruits are the outgrowth of becoming deaf to the killing of 57 million preborn children since the concoction of Roe v Wade in 1973 which uprooted "Thou Shalt Not Kill" in our culture and codified "choice" as the new commandment with the abortion mill as the new temple.

Some may reckon all this talk as an intrusion into people's lives. On the contrary, the Church sees the eternal salvation of all as infinitely more important than the risk of offending someone. Our God is a God of love and he has given us gifts to be used properly for his glory first and for our own happiness. We all need show true mercy and love for the sinner including ourselves: "pray for us sinners," we say in every Hail Mary. Our duty and yours too is to present the truth charitably. "Pray for us sinners, now ***and at the hour of our death.***" And of everyone else's death.

Isn't it time to stop redesigning God's saving plan to short-ranged pleasure principles? Instead, **isn't it time** to recognize it isn't the devil, or some one else, but rather our evil desires that need adjustment and then aim to resist them with Olympic determination for a better good and eternal life ?

Isn't it time we stop throwing away persons at the beginning and end of our life span ?

Isn't it time to back up national initiatives to champion chastity with an aim for the dignity and respect for that one who will be spouse as God has chosen and who will be companion into eternity, God willing?

And finally **isn't it time** to recognize that in our struggles, individually and nationally, family and community, Our Lord heals, forgives and strengthens if we obey his commands and trust in Him more than the greenbacks on which that trust in Him is printed? And that we in turn should bear one another's' burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ as St Paul exhorts?

No, God doesn't tempt us, though his plans don't always fit what we desire at the time. The Lord's Prayer ends with: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Simple words we pray over and over in rosaries, and in every Liturgy including Good Friday, especially so on that day because no other day does "deliver us from evil" draws its meaning and power as from the Cross. The power of the Cross has triumphed over sin, and we have a Father who loves us, and a Shepherd who saves us, a Holy Spirit who strengthens us and a Mother who watches over us.

Loving Father, carry our actions on by your gracious assistance that every work may be guided not from our inner urges but from your divine help. Through Christ our Lord. Amen!