

The Fourth Sunday after Easter - Cantate

Hymns: 190, 389, 315, 188

The INTROIT

(Ps.98:1,2)

P: Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! For He has done marvelous things;

C: His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.

P: The LORD has made known His salvation;

C: His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.

The COLLECT

O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 12:1-6

And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee.

THE GRADUAL

(Ps 118:16, Rom.6:9)

P: Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: The right hand of the Lord is exalted:

C: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. Hallelujah!

P: Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more:

C: death hath no more dominion over Him. Hallelujah!

The EPISTLE

James 1:16-21

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

P: Hallelujah! Christ, our Passover:

C: is sacrificed for us. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 16:5-15

But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you 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. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

James 1:16-21 — “Do Not Err, My Beloved Brethren”

INTRODUCTION

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James 1:16-21 — “Do Not Err, My Beloved Brethren”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Today is the Fourth Sunday after Easter and the appointed Epistle reading is James 1:16-21:

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Cantate! Sing! Thus begins the Introit of the day.

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things; His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.

Truly, we should sing a new song. Not the songs that we bring forth from our own sinful hearts, but a new song. This psalm directs the Church of all ages to sing the new song of the LORD’s righteousness that is ours through Baptism. It is not our song until the Holy Spirit enters into our hearts and lives and speaks it to our soul, creating in us a good conscience toward God. With this new and regenerated conscience a new song comes forth that radiates throughout every part of our being and produces lives that reflect the glory of God. This new song fills our lives with joy so that even the most severe trials of life cannot silence the joyous music and lyrics.

Our Epistle reading for this day directs us to continue in this outpouring from heaven into our hearts and lives so that we are not caused to wander from this rich, new life that is guaranteed for us by the resurrection of our Lord.

I. DO NOT ERR, MY BELOVED BRETHREN

Our text begins with St. James admonishing us, “**Do not err, my beloved brethren.**” A direct translation reads: “**Be not caused to roam brothers of me beloved!**”

How often do we find ourselves in need of this loving admonition? **“Be not caused to roam.”** What things cause us to roam or to wander? What things distract us in our lives so that the faith that the Holy Spirit works in us is not the way in which we walk? What things cause us to wander from the one true faith by which the peace of God that surpasses all understanding guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus?

At the beginning of this epistle James writes:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-24)

Do you perceive the things that cause us to wander from the faith? It is not the trials and temptations that we face that lead us astray, but the lusts of our own hearts. We are not content with what God gives to us and so we look for changes and improvements. We do not like facing difficulties in our lives and so we turn aside from the way of faith, which to our feeble minds seems hard. Often the first place in which we wander from the faith is in our prayers. That's right. Our prayers are often the beginning of our wandering from the true faith.

Consider how our sinful hearts lead us to pray. When we perceive that things are not the way that we want them to be, when the going is perceived as tough and unpleasant, what do we do? Do we follow the admonition of St. Paul and give thanks in all things? Ha! Do we heed the admonition of St. James and count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations?

What do we do? Don't we usually start whining and complaining? Do we even give the Holy Spirit a chance to work patience in us? Do we even ask God for the wisdom and strength to endure with faithful hearts before we cry out for God to take away the temptation and difficulty? And when we pray, do we really believe that God will do what is good? Or do we begin to try to find a way out of the difficulty ourselves? How many times do we make the situation far worse by trying to escape the trial rather than joyously continuing through it to the conclusion?

When we pray, do we seek to know God's will? Do we begin our prayers with the request for the wisdom to know how God is using the current circumstance for something good?

Do we pray that the Holy Spirit will fill us with joy through the singing of the new song of the resurrection so that we walk through the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil? Do we continue onward in the faith in which the Holy Spirit has called us, or do we begin to look in every direction to find a solution for ourselves?

Against such wanderlust St. James admonishes: **“Be not caused to roam brothers of me beloved!”** Truly, these are good words. We are the LORD’s beloved and so even as He has loved us so we love Him and one another. As we abide in His love together, as we gather to the means through which He promises to be with us and to give Himself and His love to us, we are kept from roaming.

My mother has spoken at various times of how when we were little that she would attach us to the clothesline so that we would be able to play freely, safe from wandering off where the rattlesnakes and other dangers were. I do not even remember this apart from her telling me about it. I do remember the playpen, but not from when I was kept in it, but rather from when my younger brother and sister were kept in it. Yet I know that I also was kept safe to play and enjoy myself within the safety of the playpen.

St. James tells us that God uses the trials and temptations that we face in a similar way. As long as we continue in the trust that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts these trials and temptations do us no harm, but rather, they direct us to turn to the LORD to receive His protection and care. God often uses the difficulties of this world to keep us on the straight and narrow path. When our prayers do not wander but rather continue in the confidence of our Father’s faithfulness, He directs us in the safe way through this world, that is, He draws us unto Jesus in the gathering unto the means of grace.

II. EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, . . .

By direct translation:

Be not caused to roam brothers of me beloved! Every giving good and every gift complete above is.

This is truly wonderful! This is exactly the opposite of what our lustful and sinful hearts expect. Every giving that is good and every gift that is complete is above. This calls to mind the words of St. Paul to the Colossians:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

While it is true that every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and it is possible to translate this text according to this understanding, is this really what St. James tells us? Or is he in agreement with St. Paul? Consider what makes us wander from the safety of the pure Gospel and the true faith of the pure Gospel? What causes us to roam from the life of true faith so that we go astray? Is it not that we forget that Christ is seated at the right hand of God

working all good things for us?

Where do we find perfection in this world? There is only one place. No, I do not mean in our imagination. Perfection is found in the body of Christ where all things are joined together into God's Holy Communion. The intersection of time and eternity is the New Testament in Christ's blood. As we gather to receive the giving that is good and the gift that is perfect and complete, we are kept in God's Holy Communion and our safety is made absolute. As we eat the bread of the unity that is given with Christ's body and as we drink the wine of the life that is given with Christ's blood, we are kept in the safety of God's kingdom. We are washed into His kingdom through Baptism by which we die to the things of this world and are made alive in Christ, and we are nourished and strengthened through the Supper of forgiveness and communion with God.

Yes, this is the source by which we receive the good giving and the complete gifts that are above. These cannot be reached by any attempt on our part. No one can reach high enough to pull them down from heaven and acquire them for oneself. They are above and must be received according to the means which Christ has ordained in His Church.

III. AND COMETH DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS

Be not caused to roam brothers of me beloved! Every giving good and every gift complete above is, coming down from the Father of the lights in whom is no variableness or of turning shadow.

We live in an age when men rely upon variableness and of turning shadow. No one seems to expect anything to stay the same. Today's scientists base their understanding upon change that cannot be measured, such as evolution that is presumed to happen according to a direction of mutation that no one has ever observed even once, or such as climate changes that are occurring in the exact opposite direction of what they are claiming, or such as economics that do not work in the way that they claim.

Among those claiming to be Christians, the same is happening. Churches look to manmade corporations, also called church bodies, and to high tech equipment, and to clever presentations, and to contemporary music that imitates the music of the world. All of these things are unreliable and change continually. What is proclaimed to be the way of growth today is denounced tomorrow.

It is not so with the good giving and the perfect gifts that are above, that come down from the Father of the lights. In Him there is no variableness or of turning shadow. There is no obscurity in His dealings with us. He is light. In His presence darkness is obliterated. No gray areas exist in the presence of the light of His grace, mercy, peace, and love.

He is light and the Father of the lights. His good giving and His perfect gifts are above and descend to us from Him. How is this effected? How does God accomplish this?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . . He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he

power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John1:1-5, 11-13)

Jesus is the Light. In Him we are made to be lights with Him. Moreover, the congregations that gather unto the pure Gospel and the pure administration of the Gospel in the Sacraments, those congregations that are a true gathering into His name, they are lights in this world, strategically placed by God as beacons unto the world. By His will God brings the lights into existence. Jesus is the Son of light from eternity. We are regenerated into Him by the will of the Father through the activity of the Holy Spirit in the administration of the Word. The Word is God and He descends to us to administer to us the good giving and the perfect gifts that are above. These are the things of heaven, but are made available to us through the Word that surrounds us in the preaching and that lives in us through the water and renews us through the bread and the wine.

This is how God has worked from the very beginning. He created the world for us through the Word and then the Word stooped down to fashion us with His own hands and to breathe into us the breath of life. When Adam roamed, the Word came and called him back to faith. The Word spoke to Moses and Moses wrote what was given. The Word spoke to every generation until finally the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us to give Himself as an atoning sacrifice for us. The Word rose again in the flesh from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God and He continues to come to us to give us the good giving and the perfect gifts that He purchased for us with His death and secured for us with His resurrection and ascension. These gifts have not changed. He continues to come to us with His flesh and blood to give to us the blessings of heaven. On this we can rely completely, now and forevermore.

CONCLUSION

This is the life that is ours in Christ Jesus. This is the life of faith from which St. James warns us not to be caused to roam. No matter what trials and temptations that confront us in our daily lives, we know beyond any doubt that the good giving and the perfect gifts are available for us. They are secured above where Christ rules on our behalf, and from the Father of lights they descend to us in the form of the pure preaching of the Gospel and the pure administration of the Sacraments. These are given to us until our Lord Jesus comes again in glory. These are given for us to keep us and guard us from going astray. As long as these are the means to which we turn in faith, the true faith shall never depart from us. Truly there is no variableness or of turning shadow with the LORD. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His way is simple. He comes to us and gives us the good things by which we have forgiveness, life, and salvation. Let us therefore eat and drink at His Table that He has prepared for us. Let us sing the new song of true faith and live in the absolute confidence of knowing the faithfulness of our God. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.