

1 S. in Lent 2/21/21  
James 1:12-18 B

**BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO REMAINS STEADFAST UNDER TRIAL, FOR WHEN HE HAS STOOD THE TEST HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE, WHICH GOD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.**

Blessed. Abraham is blessed because God has given him a lot of stuff. Abraham had silver and gold; he had male and female servants; he had flocks, he had donkeys, he had camels, but none of that is the reason Abraham is blessed.

God came to Abraham and promised that he would be the “Father of many nations,” so that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and the sand upon the seashores. When he was 100 years old and his wife, Sarah, was 90 years old, God gave them the gift of a son, Isaac. Their only son. All the promises of God are dependent upon Isaac. He is the first star. He is the first grain of sand on the seashore. All the promises of God would come through Isaac.

Then we read this: A few years after Isaac was born, God came to Abraham again and said this, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (v. 2). Can you imagine what was racing through Abraham’s mind if he did what God told him to do? How in the world will God’s promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and sand upon the seashore ever going to be fulfilled if Abraham goes and does what it is God commanded him to do? “Take your son, your only-begotten son, whom you love and sacrifice him”. Kill your son, that’s the word that comes from God.

Abraham does as he is told. He gathers the wood, the knife, his son, two servants and they sent out for the mountain God had told them about. And on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Abraham said this, “I and the boy will go over there and worship and [we will] come again to you” (v. 5). “I and the boy will go over there and worship and we – **plural** – will come back to you”. How can Abraham say that? Abraham believed the words and promises of God. He believed that even if he killed his son, God would raise him from the dead and the words and promises of God would be fulfilled in and through Isaac.

Abraham trusts God. He trusts God to the extent that he takes the wood and builds an altar, binds Isaac upon it, takes the knife in hand to slay him, and God speaks another word, “Don’t harm the boy”. God supplies a ram as a substitute and Abraham sacrifices the ram in Isaac’s place. And the words and promises of God are fulfilled through Isaac.

That’s why we call Abraham blessed. Abraham is blessed because in and through this trial, he trusted and believed the words and promises of God. “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (v. 12). That is truly what happened with Abraham.

It is good that we learn from Abraham because not one of us is immune from trial. Trials come to all of us. One faces the trial of illness and infirmity, even approaching death; another faces the trial of family fallout, such that your enemies are now the members of your own household; another faces living every day with the pain and hurt of past wrongs.

God, in His wisdom and mercy, uses these trials to draw us closer to Himself. That’s why James says, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him”.

It is interesting for us to remember that in the Bible, this word we translate as “trial,” can also mean “temptation”. What often happens is this: As you are undergoing some trial meant to draw you closer to God, you turn that into a temptation. You decide you are not going to go with God, you are going another way. You are going to do things your way. When you do that, you give in to that temptation and you sin against God and then, what do you do? You blame God!

You’re not the first person to do that. The first person to do that was Adam. He had a trial right in the Garden. He was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of God and evil that God put in the Garden. But he was tempted when he heard the words of the serpent in the Garden. And, he sinned against God. And after he had sinned against God, what did he do? No, no, no, he does **not** blame Eve. He blamed God! “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Ge 3:12). In other words, “God, it’s all your fault. You are to blame. You are the reason I’m in this terrible mess. If you hadn’t given me that woman, none of this would have happened”.

But, there is no room to blame God. God is not the one who tempts you. God tempts no one to sin. The reason you are tempted is because of your own flesh. You have a desire and that desire is not to please God, but please yourself. James teaches us this in our lesson, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (vv. 13-14).

Your desire – your sinful, selfish, self-serving desire – gets in the way of your trusting the word and promises of God and you sin against God. “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is

fully grown brings forth death” (v. 15). And that is the death of hell for all eternity.

But, the GOOD NEWS for you, Dear Child of God, is that that will not happen to you. Here’s why: James says, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (v. 17). The greatest and most precious gift is the true Light that lightens every man. That true light is Jesus Christ.

He knows what it is to face trial and temptation. You heard about it in our Gospel lesson. The Spirit drives Jesus out into the wilderness. And there, He is tempted. Remember, God tempts no one to sin. He is tempted by the father of all lies to doubt and mistrust the words and promises of God. That temptation doesn’t work. Jesus remains steadfast to the word and promises of God. He endures that temptation for you.

He endures another temptation for you. As Jesus hangs upon the cross of Calvary bearing your sin, He is tempted by the voice of the crowd, “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” (Mk 15:32). But again, it doesn’t work. Jesus remains steadfast to the will of God for you and for your salvation, as He prays, “Father, into your hands I commit My spirit” (Lk 23:46). And He dies. By that death, he earns for you the forgiveness for all the sins you commit when you give it to your desires, when you go your own way, and all your sins.

After He rises from the dead, He ascends into heaven. But He still comes to you in and through the waters of Holy Baptism to give you forgiveness, deliverance from death and the devil and the eternal salvation He won for you on the cross.

And your Baptism gives you something else, as well, -- the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that allows you to remain steadfast to the words and promises of God as you walk by road by faith. The Spirit is the One who brings to your remembrance all that Jesus has done for you, so that when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, you are comforted and made brave. The Spirit is the One who brings you the words and promises of God so that when you are in the midst of a trial, you, like Abraham remain steadfast, and for that, you are blessed.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.