

Text: James 1:17-18, 21b-22, 27
Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
1 September 2018
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Years ago, I remember a TV crime drama (the name forgotten), and an episode of that crime drama in which a Hollywood screenwriter had written a script that exposed the corruption of the leadership of the entertainment industry. I remember vividly how struck I was that the title of his script, and the title of the episode, was, “Put No Trust in Princes” - a line from the Book of Psalms, Psalm 146:3,

Put no trust in princes,
in mortal men in whom there is no help.

The memory of that TV episode, and the title of that script - “Put No Trust in Princes” - came flooding back to me this week, when Pope Francis refused to respond to the allegations of Archbishop Vigano that Pope Francis was complicit in the abuse of minors on American shores. I wanted to cry out: “Holy Father, don’t abandon us! You tell priests to shepherd their people. Holy Father, shepherd us now!” But what we got was silence. *Put no trust in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no help.*

Then Cardinal Blasé Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, defended Pope Francis’ silence in a TV interview, saying the Pope was leaving it to the media to investigate, and adding: “The Pope has a bigger agenda. He’s gotta get on with other things, of talking about the environment and protecting migrants and carrying on the work of the Church. We’re not going down a rabbit hole on this.” To be fair, Cardinal Cupich now says the interview was unfairly edited. But, having watched the unedited footage, I don’t think it any better. I am appalled. Where do they get these bishops? But, as the Psalm says, *Put no trust in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no help.*

Where, then, can we put our trust? Only in the perfect gift come down from above - the Lord Jesus Christ.

The apostle James—the brother of Jesus and leader of the Christians in Jerusalem—the apostle James has a unique name for God. Today and for the next Sundays at Mass, we’re reading through

the Letter from the apostle James. James was a relative of Jesus and the leader of the Christians in Jerusalem. Today, James calls God, our heavenly Father, the Father of *lights*. Not “the Father of light,” but “the Father of *lights*”. When James calls God the “Father of lights”, James is talking about the sun, the moon, the stars, the planets. The Father created all those heavenly lights. But even those heavenly lights change and alter. Those lights don’t stay fixed in one place in the sky. The world of Jesus and James had decent astronomers—think of the Wise Men following the star, the sign in the heavens. People in Jesus’ and James’ day knew that which stars they saw changed with the seasons. They knew the difference between stars and planets—planets they called “wanderers”, because the planets wandered through the night sky on their orbits. They saw the phases of the brightness of the moon, from full moon to new moon. They observed the different places the sun rose and set, with stronger and weaker light, through the year. James uses that popular understanding of the changing lights of heaven to contrast that changeableness and variation of created things with the unchangeableness of the God who created them, “the Father of lights, with whom there is no alteration or shadow caused by change,” (*James 1:17*) as James puts it.

James reminds us today that every perfect gift comes down to us from heaven, from the unchanging Father of lights. God and his gifts, and the certainty that the Father will supply us with the gifts we need, are the only certain things in the uncertainty of our existence. And the greatest gift from heaven to us is Jesus, the Son of God. Jesus is God’s fixed point in an unstable world, and in a Church in crisis. Jesus is the unmoving, unchanging fixed point at the center of life. Unlike mortal men; unlike the princes of the Church; unlike the lights of heaven which have no fixed position, and no unvarying light, Jesus—the Light of the World—never dims or varies.

We were physically born into this world as the gift of life from God. The Father of lights has gone on to give us the perfect gift of Jesus, in order for us also to have a *spiritual* birth, to be reborn—born again—into a new life as children of God, living with Jesus and saved by Jesus. Jesus is the Father’s *Word*, the full expression of who God is, spoken into the world to show us what is the truth of our existence. On trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus tells Pilate, “I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” But Pilate, not understanding Jesus, replies, “What is truth?” (*John 18:37–38*)

Unlike Pontius Pilate, we have welcomed Jesus, the word of truth, into our lives. James compares Jesus, God's word of truth, to a seed God has planted in our souls to produce a harvest greater than the zucchini and squash and cucumbers we've been pulling from our gardens this summer, a harvest of transformed lives opened to hope and rich in good works to lead the world into hope along with us. James says the Father of lights, "willed to give us birth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creation." (*James 1:18*) Firstfruits are the first produce of the season from the garden, the first fruit from the orchard, the first crops from the fields - the first promises of the more bountiful harvest to come. The Father of lights, the Lord of Creation, is transforming all his creatures, including us, into the *new* creation: the full harvest brought about by the perfect gift from above, coming down from the Father of lights, the gift of Jesus who through his death and resurrection has inaugurated that new creation.

We followers of Jesus are the ones in whom that new creation has begun. We are the firstfruits of God's harvest, we are the sign of the harvest that will only be completed and gathered in when Jesus comes back to shut the door on this creation and open the door all the way into the eighth day of creation, where there is no light of star or moon or sun, but only the unchanging light of the glory of God, as described in the Book of Revelation (*Revelation 21:23*). Until that day, in the face of crisis and lack of truth, our responsibility is to nurture, grow, and share that word of truth that has been planted in us, that new life of Jesus, so that every person may experience the gifts of the Father of lights, and be gathered into his harvest.