

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Holiness of True Wisdom Seventh Week in Ordinary Time Monday, February 24, 2014
8:15 AM **Jas 3:13-18;** Mk 9:14-29 (Always human reason has acknowledged what is good.)

Today we are reading from the Letter of St. James. The topic is wisdom and, therefore, holiness. William James observed, as I've said before, that although there are many different doctrines and many different religions and many different religious practices in the world, there is a basically singular, common, **sense of what it means to be holy**, what it means to be a saint; and that's all tied to a basic tradition of wisdom **shared by all religious traditions**, even though embedded in many different cultures.

So this is what St. James is talking about, **this wisdom that leads us to true holiness**. Holiness is here understood and it is usually understood as qualities that are healthful and healthy and, therefore, holy and godly, so that godliness, holiness, health, well-being, sanctification, salvation are all really part of a single package, interrelated, different ways of talking about being fully alive as a human being, reflecting the glory of God. As St. Irenaeus said, "**The glory of God is a man fully alive,**" a person fully alive, human being fully alive. That's God's glory. And so it's remarkable to observe this glory of God, found also in pre-Christian China, pre-Christian India, and many other places, because wisdom is wisdom. Humanity is humanity. **Always human reason has acknowledged what is good.** Some people err; individuals err, but on the whole, people know what is good.

At the same time we can see that many people don't bother with the sort of discipline needed to bring all these qualities together because it does take effort to get all this together. This is what **spiritual practice is**. This is what religion is all about; it's about getting all this together, **working on being good, holy, godly, human**. You mean we have to work at being human? Yes, that's why St. James says there is such a thing as a worldly kind of wisdom, but he says this

“does not come down from above, but it’s earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” This is described as something which is “jealous and selfish and ambitious.” Those are not godly qualities. Anything egotistical, egocentric, self-centered, selfish is not godly. That’s not the way God is. Anything small, petty, divisive is not godly. In fact, the word *diabolus*, devil, means the one who divides. **Anything that is divisive is diabolical, whereas what is godly is “pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity.” Everyone in the world can acknowledge the goodness of these qualities.**

What James is saying is we have to make an effort to incorporate them into our presence, into our being. How do we do that? First of all, **we have to be reflective.** We have to look at ourselves, and we have to be willing to see what perhaps is not godly, and then stop wanting it. That is an act of the will. We have to **observe our desires** and decide which ones don’t fit this picture of what it means to be a saint or a wise person. And if we don’t, then we are not wise. That’s what he is saying: then you are a fool. If you are a fool, you don’t pursue anything really good. You just go with whatever you want. That’s the life of foolishness. That’s the life we see all around us. That’s the life portrayed in the movies and in novels, and we know it’s portrayed in the lives of people all around us. But as he says, this is not for us. “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.” So two things he leaves us: first of all, it starts with **humility not self-importance**; it cultivates peace. **Cultivating peace is going against all the self-centered, divisive qualities that are demonic and unspiritual.**