

James 1:17-27^{vi}

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

^{vi} **About James 1:17-27**

For the next few weeks, the second reading is taken from the letter of James. This sermon-like letter, addressed to the Church in general, consists primarily of loosely organized ethical advice of a sort common to Jewish and Christian writings. Its basis is halakah (literally “walking”), the Jewish word for practical guidelines for walking in God's way. James appeals to the understanding of God's will shared by both early Christians and Jews.

The author addresses those who have been given “birth by the word of truth” (v. 18)—a phrase that could be used equally of humankind as the first fruit of the creation (Genesis 1) and of Christians as the first fruits of redeemed humanity. This implanted word brings salvation, but

one must do it as well as hear it.

The image of a mirror, which in those times gave an indistinct reflection, is used for the forgetful hearer. The one who both hears and acts discovers the true self in “the perfect law” (v. 25) of Jesus’ teachings. True religion involves not only belief but also practical behavior expressing social responsibility (Exodus 22:22; Matthew 25:31-46; 1 John 4:20) and moral uprightness (1 John 2:15-17).