

## 25<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – James 3:16- 4-3

Be careful what you wish for, you might get it. It is the old story of the genie and the magic lamp. Three wishes, most of which are wasted on frivolous fantasy, and suddenly the magic is gone. Or winning the lottery, which so often has plunged the winner into personal and relational ruin.

We are like children running wide-eyed through a Toy Store. Many of us spend untold hours thinking that our lives would be richer, more fulfilled, more meaningful if we only had that one shiny thing more—more stuff, more hair, more height, more money . . . just something more—there is no end to our wanting.

But here is the kicker, someone else wants what we want too, and so we **compete**. Or we desire what someone else already has, and then we **covet**. Either way, a society of grasping hands and scheming hearts ends up in a frenzied fight, like contestants on the reality TV series Survivor.

But God intended so much more for us than this. We were not put on this earth to outlast, outdo, and outwit each other until only one ruthless winner emerges.

God placed us on this earth, and especially in the Church, to become a community of faith, a family of souls where the common good was the primary “want,” rather than individual desires.

In this game, played by God’s rules, everyone wins. No one gets voted off the island. And everyone ends up laughing together, working together, and serving together. It might not make interesting television, but isn’t that the kind of society all of us really want?

Our reading from the Epistle of James today speaks to this longing in all of us. James says that jealousy and dissension on the personal level, and war and strife at the national level, arise from this morbid craving for more.

The desire to possess, to conquer, to get to the top of the hill before anyone else gets there, and then protect that spot at all costs—this is the game of the corporate ladder, and the path of so much of our relationship carnage.

When we value possessions more than people, and riches more than relationships, and conquests more than community, we have slipped into the trap of our own desires.

We have become ensnared in the myth of Midas, whose lust for gold eventually destroyed everything precious to him.

Yes, be careful what you ask for, because you might get it. Many people have learned to their dismay that starting their own business, which they fantasized would be a heavenly bliss of no more boss lording over them, ended up realizing that business owners have many, many bosses, and many concerns and risks and long hours that employees could not imagine.

Many people who yearn to retire early end up realizing they have not made adequate **emotional** preparation, and they end up feeling lost and useless and bored after just a week of playing golf every day.

Many parents who thought that having a child would be the romantic solution to their marital boredom found instead that children are real work, as well as real delight, and that dirty diapers and PTA meetings are not very romantic after all.

And how many all-you-can-eat buffets have we desired, and now the lingering cholesterol is lining our arteries? Yes, for our own sakes, as well as the sake of others, we need to be more careful about what we **want**.

So, what is the answer to this risky business of desires and wants? St. James offers us the key. He tells us, “*You ask but you do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.*”

If our desires are primarily driven by our own passions, to satisfy our own personal wants, that is a clue our wants will likely end up disappointing us, and risk damaging our relationships with others.

We must learn to be honest with ourselves at this point. For our ability to rationalize our desires is very subtle and very strong.

The questions to ask with honesty are these: Does this desire, this want, truly serve anyone’s interests but mine? Does it build up others, and draw me closer to others? Does the fulfillment of this desire serve the common good, or just my personal good?

If the answer to these questions, truthfully considered, tends toward the selfish side of the equation, we would do ourselves, and the world, a favor by cancelling the order on that desire while we have the chance.

The right heart to guide our wanting and wishing, according to St. James, is shaped by “*wisdom from above, which is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without insincerity.*”

Such wisdom will not lead us astray into our own selfish cravings, but back to the community of friends and family God provided for us in the first place.

The next time we go to the mall to go shopping just because we are bored, or we watch the late night home shopping channel as it tries to inspire an artificial desire for a product we never even heard about, or we glance across the way with envy at the life or possessions of another, we ought to take a deep breath, step back from our cravings, and recall this good counsel from Brother James in this little epistle from Holy Scripture.

Remember, contentment in life is **not** found when we finally **have** what we want, but when we finally **want** what we have.

And that is all our loving and generous Heavenly Father wanted for us all along.

AMEN.