

The Letter of St. James

On

Christian Practical Wisdom

Rosmini Centre – 17th September 2019



The Letter of St. James is a real gem, little known and the object of controversy in the past.

Martin Luther included the Letter in his list of books of the New Testament but he called it a “letter of straw”, of no importance in which the reader cannot find the JESUS of the Gospels.

The reason for his dislike was James’ insistence that “faith without works is dead”. This seems to go against what St. Paul says in Romans and in Galatians. Paul seems to be saying, according to Luther, that “faith alone” is sufficient for salvation; James, on the contrary seems to be saying that “works” are also essential.

Scholars today seem to agree that there is no opposition between Paul and James, and that the two views are complementary.



Which JAMES is the James of the Letter?

It cannot be **James Zebedee** the brother of John, who was killed by Herod in 44AD – 10 years after our Lord's Ascension. He is called James the greater – his body is said to rest at Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Is he **James son of Alphaeus**? The answer is yes. He was the son of **Mary and Alphaeus** (or Clopas), and this Mary was **MARY's sister or cousin** who stood with MARY at the foot of the Cross. James was, therefore, a **cousin of JESUS**, or, as is said in the Gospel, in Acts, in Galatians, **“the brother of the LORD”**.

James had other brothers and sisters – Joses, Simon, Jude Taddaeus, for example – all called “brothers” of the Lord.

JAMES was, therefore, **one of the APOSTLES**, called by JESUS, and he was the “brother of the Lord” and **the first Bishop of Jerusalem**. He was killed by the Jews in 62AD.



James the Great (anon)



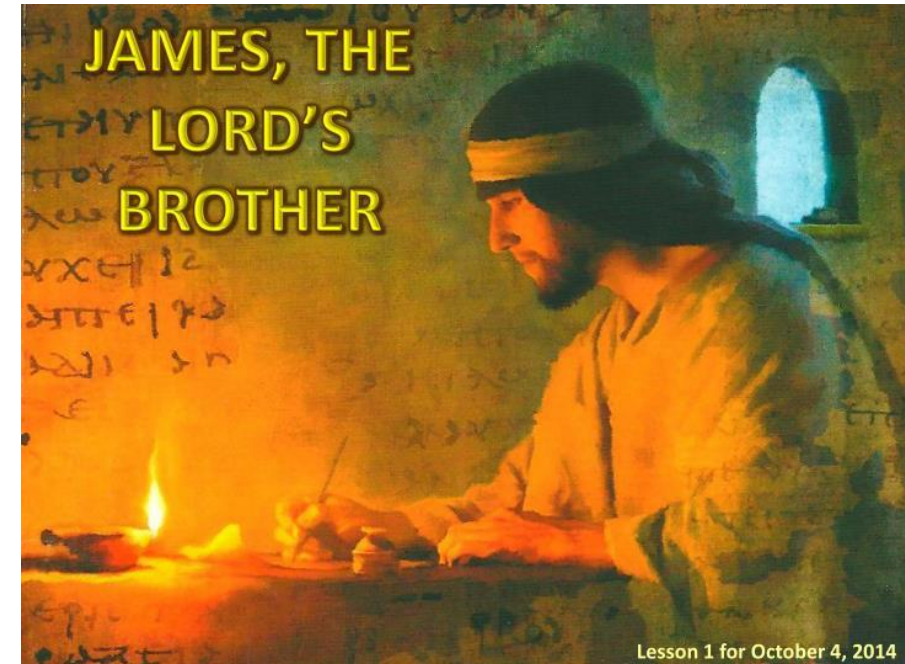
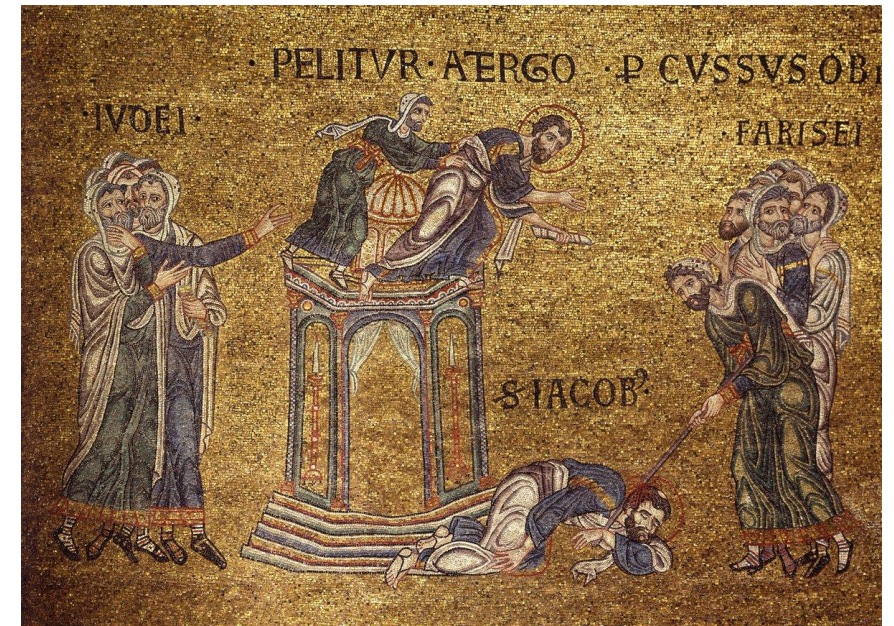
James was called by Christians and Jews alike the “**JUST**”: tradition tells us that he was highly respected for his austere manner of life, perhaps a “**nazarite**” like John the Baptist, and his devout observance of the Law.

After the Ascension, as the brother of the Lord, he was, with Peter and John, a column of the early church in Jerusalem – as Paul testified.

He spoke with great openness at the Council of Jerusalem in 49AD, and fully supported Peter and Paul about the admission of the Gentiles into the Church.

His name was often mentioned by the enemies of Paul who claimed that Paul was wrong in not compelling converted Gentiles to be circumcised or to obey the Jewish traditions. They used the name of James without being commissioned by him.

James, we are told by St. Paul, had the grace of an apparition of the Risen Christ, see 1 Corinthians 15.



JAMES wrote the LETTER from Jerusalem, probably in the year 60 AD. He addressed it to the “twelve tribes” dispersed all over the Roman Empire.

It is likely that James wrote during a time of persecution of Christians during which the Christian Jews had to flee from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. The year 44AD saw such early period, and similarly the years 60-62 AD after the death of Festus.

This is why the words “persecution” “suffering” “endurance” recur so often in the letter. This is very similar to what John wrote to the persecuted Christians in Revelation: in it, the word “endurance” is the most recurring word.

It is difficult to divide the Letter in sections or in themes. It is similar to Ecclesiasticus or to Proverbs in the Old Testament, it is a kind of wisdom letter full of advice and recommendations on many topics. There is little doctrine but plenty of Christian practical ethical teaching.

1



- persecutions are to be borne with patience and joy (2-4);
- wisdom must be asked of God with confidence (5-8);
- humility is recommended (9-11);
- God is not the author of evil but of good (12-18);
- we must be slow to anger (19-21);
- not faith only, but also good works are necessary (22-27).

2



- Against respect of persons (ii, 1-13);
- another exhortation to good works (14-26).

3



- Against the evils of the tongue (iii, 1-12);
- against envy and discord, 13-18.

4



- Against wars and contentions (iv, 1-3);
- against the spirit of this world and pride (4-10);
- against detraction (11-13a);
- against vain confidence in worldly things (13b-16).

5



- Against the rich that oppress the poor (v, 1-6);
- exhortation to patience in the time of oppression (7-11), and to avoiding swearing (12);
- of the anointing of the sick (13-15);
- of prayer (16);
- we must have at heart the conversion of sinners (19-20).

CHAPTER ONE

PERSEVERANCE:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

LISTENING AND DOING

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

CHAPTER TWO

FAVORITISM FORBIDDEN

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

FAITH AND DEEDS

⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless^[d]? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

CHAPTER THREE

TAMING THE TONGUE

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. **Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect**, able to keep their whole body in check.

Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, **the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts**. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but **no human being can tame the tongue**. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ **With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings**, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹²

TRUE WISDOM

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUBMIT YOURSELVES TO GOD

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.**

Brothers and sisters, **do not slander one another.** Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister^[d] or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?

BOASTING ABOUT TOMORROW

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? **You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.** ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” ¹⁶ As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.

CHAPTER FIVE

WARNING TO RICH OPPRESSORS

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

ENDURANCE IN SUFFERING

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned.

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ **Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.**

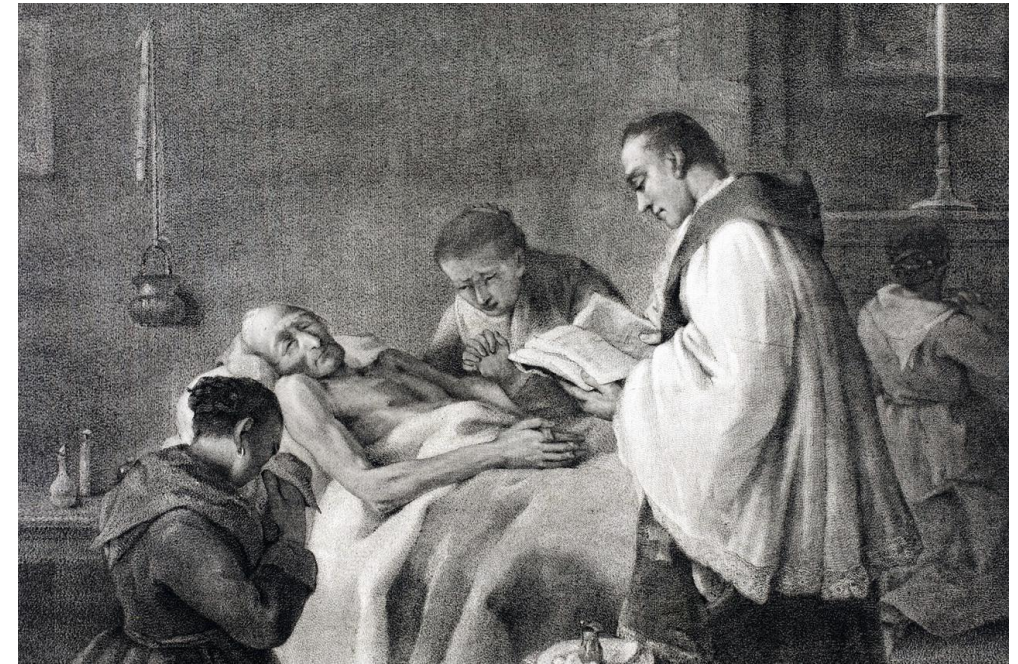
The 4 SINS that cry to Heaven for Vengeance

- 1- Wilful murder
- 2- The sin of Sodom, or carnal sin against nature
- 3- Oppressing of the poor
- 4- To defraud working men of their wages

(N. 4 is based on James 5)

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

This is a direct precious evidence that bishops/priests anointed sick people right from the origin of the Church as we do today in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, which has, therefore, biblical foundations..



JAMES

“Faith, by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (2, 17)
“A man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (2, 24)

PAUL

“Faith working through love” (Gal. 5, 6)
“God will render every man according to his works” ((Rom. 2, 6)

WORKS in line with the Sermon on the Mount:

- 1- Patience in trials
- 2- Control of the tongue
- 3- Care for the poor
- 4- Don't grade people according to positions
- 5- Humility
- 6- Don't envy rich, greedy people

JESUS

“Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father “
(Matthew 7, 21)

WORKS condemned by PAUL:

- 1- Old Testament observance of the Mosaic law
- 2- Man made traditions

Knowledge of truth should never be a cerebral thing: it should be something practical, something that help us love God and our neighbour as ourselves. Do the Will of God.