

Lent Meditation 3



Jam.1,2-4;13-14

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

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

We shouldn't need reminding, but in our weakness do: Faith in the true and living God is a most powerful thing. Within the trinity of 'Faith, Hope, and Love' faith is the all-conquering force to which belongs God's victory. Faith gives to those who have it the power to be victorious over the world, over death, hell and sin. To faith alone belong possibilities that are beyond the reach of mortals. *“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”* (Mt.17,20) Or Mk.9,23: *“‘If you can?’ said Jesus. ‘Everything is possible for one who believes!’”*

Faith being such a great and exceedingly precious thing, tasked in our world with the job to make possible the otherwise impossible, it shouldn't come as a surprise that it must undergo testing. Indeed, it is, with things that need to be fit for purpose, usually only rigorous testing that shows what's really there and brings what is really there to the fore. Many kinds of trials, therefore, must be experienced by those who believe.

The intention of these trials *in themselves* is to make the believer unsure of their faith and lead into doubt, to create a pathway for a person's evil desires to entice and drag them away from faith. Yet, seemingly in the face of their destructive intention, James teaches that we should consider such trials “pure joy”. Why? Because the uncertainty and doubt with regard to faith that is produced by the onslaught of trials presents the opportunity to persevere.

Perseverance, as always when it is in a matter of truth, of something valid and good, leads to a strengthening, it brings to the fore what's really there.

But what is the perseverance of faith? Let us not think that it is foremost about an emotion or about a sense of personal belief, that "I believe". In the biblical sense, faith rests not in something I do, but on God's promise and word.

I believe to the extent that I trust in the promise and word of God; and I trust in the promise of God to the extent that I listen to his word – even Christ Jesus! – and let it alone be true (Rom.3,4). Perseverance, then, is with regard to the promise of God, it is a defiant "Yet I hold to his word! As it says, so it shall be."

It is for this reason that Luther rightly taught us to see trials as a great teacher, teaching us to pay ever closer attention to God's promises, which are all 'Yes in Christ Jesus' ("*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ*" – 2Cor.1,20). For, to the extent and in the manner we do, to that extent and in that manner we shall learn what's really there.

Yes, "let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."