

# LETTER OF JAMES



**W**ho is this James? He is probably the “brother of the Lord,” barely mentioned in the Gospel, with regard to his mother (Mk 6:3; 15:40; 16:1). And yet, he was privileged to have the risen Jesus appear to him (1 Cor 15:7). It also seems that when he is about to go underground, Peter entrusts the Church of Jerusalem to him (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). Later on, James appears to have been responsible for all the Christian communities, with a majority of Jews, that were established in Palestine, Syria, and Cilicia (see Acts 15:13-29).

Of all the apostles, James was the most attached to Jewish traditions (the opposite of Paul). Yet, although Paul harshly criticized James’ associates, he seemed to have more than personal respect for James. In addressing the faithful dispersed outside Palestine, James is teaching them simple and practical things inspired by the wisdom of the Old Testament. We recognize authentic religion by the way we live and treat people around us.

We cannot fail to see that the passage where James shows that faith is nothing without works (2:14-26) contradicts, at least seemingly, Paul’s

declarations about justification by faith in Galatians 5 and Romans 4. However, a careful study shows that James was familiar with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians when he wrote his letter. Paul had forcefully declared that faith is nothing without love (1 Cor 13:2) and James simply approved. Without contradicting James, in Galatians and Romans, Paul emphasized that faith purifies the heart of pagans and Jews, long before we accomplish the works of love that God has prepared beforehand for us to practice (Eph 2:10).

What is evident from the many contacts between the letters of Peter, James, and Paul is that the Church was not a galaxy of dispersed communities set in their own interpretations of the faith and their attachment to a particular apostle—something we read all too often in works of the last century such as the—“Johannine circles,” the “Pauline communities,” the “Lukan communities,” etc. The letters of the apostles traveled very fast and people received them from one end of the Mediterranean basin to the other. The Church of the apostles was a reality even when the apostles confronted one another.

Here, Christians are called the twelve tribes dispersed among the nations. In fact, the term “Diaspora,” that is to say, “dispersion” was used to refer to Jews who had settled outside their homeland. In view of what we have said, James must have written his letter in the year 56 A.D., between 1 Corinthians and Galatians. In any case, we know that James was stoned to death in the year 62 A.D.

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## Endure trials patiently

**1** James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, sends greetings to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

<sup>2</sup>Consider yourselves fortunate, my brothers and sisters, when you meet with every kind of trial, <sup>3</sup>for you know that the testing of your faith makes you steadfast. <sup>4</sup>Let your steadfastness become perfect with deeds, that you yourselves may be perfect and blameless, without any defect.

<sup>5</sup>If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all easily and unconditionally. <sup>6</sup>But ask with faith, not doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave driven and tossed on the sea by the wind. <sup>7</sup>Such a person should not expect anything from the Lord since the doubter has two minds <sup>8</sup>and his conduct will always be insecure.

<sup>9</sup>Let the believer who is poor, boast in being uplifted, <sup>10</sup>and let the rich one boast in being humbled, because he will pass away like the flower of the field. <sup>11</sup>The sun rises and its heat dries the grass; the flower withers and its beauty vanishes. So, too, will the rich person fade away even in the midst of his pursuits.

<sup>12</sup>Happy are those who patiently endure trials because afterward, they will receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup>No one, when tempted, should say, “This temptation comes from God.” God is never tempted, and he can never tempt anyone. <sup>14</sup>Instead, each of us is lured and enticed by our own evil desire. <sup>15</sup>Once this desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when fully grown, gives birth to death.

<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my beloved. <sup>17</sup>Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of Light, in whom there is no change or shadow of a change. <sup>18</sup>By his own will, he gave us life through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of offering to him, among his creatures.

**JAMES 1:1-18**

**Read:** Written for Jewish Christians, the central theme is the public manifestation of personal commitments and their shared beliefs about God. James speaks about trials that shake faithfulness to God, blessing people who despite their difficulties remain faithful to God in their heart and action.

**Reflect:** What trials in your life shake your faithfulness to God? What helps you remain faithful?

**Pray:** God of faith, hope, and love: we open our hearts and minds to trust in your mercy, knowing that when we put our worries in your hands, your love sustains us.

**Act:** Stay committed to doing works of mercy even when the going gets difficult.

<sup>19</sup>My beloved, be quick to hear but slow to speak, and slow to anger, <sup>20</sup>for human anger does not fulfill the justice of God. <sup>21</sup>So get rid of any filth, and reject the prevailing evil, and welcome the word that has been planted in you, and has the power to save you.

<sup>22</sup>Be doers of the word, and not just hearers, lest you deceive yourselves. <sup>23</sup>The hearer, who does not become a doer, is like that one who looked at himself in the mirror; <sup>24</sup>he looked, and then promptly forgot what he was like. <sup>25</sup>But those who fix their gaze on the perfect law of freedom and hold onto it, not listening and then forgetting, but acting on it, will find blessing on their deeds.

<sup>26</sup>Those who think they are religious but do not restrain their tongue, deceive themselves and their religion is in vain. <sup>27</sup>In the sight of God our Father, pure and blameless religion lies in helping the orphans and widows in their need and keeping oneself from the world's corruption.

**JAMES 1:19-27**

**Read:** The author outlines the conditions for the Word of God to be effective in those who receive it. It is not enough to just listen to it; we need live it.

**Reflect:** In what ways do you hear the Word of God and make it part of you?

**Pray:** Help me to you Lord and trust you so much I live what I believe.

**Act:** Have your lifestyle mirror your faith in the God of love. Offer to help to someone in need.

### Treat the rich and the poor equally

**2**<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, if you truly believe in our glorified Lord Jesus Christ, you will not discriminate between persons. <sup>2</sup>Suppose a person enters the synagogue where you are assembled, dressed magnificently and wearing a gold ring; at the same time, a poor person enters dressed in rags, <sup>3</sup>if you focus your attention on the well-dressed and say, “Come and sit in the best seat,” while, to the poor one you say, “Stay standing, or else sit down at my feet,” <sup>4</sup>have you not, in fact, made a distinction between the two? Have you not judged using a double standard?

<sup>5</sup>Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, did God not choose the poor of this world to receive the riches of faith, and to inherit the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>Yet, you despise them! Is it not the rich who are against you and drag you to court? <sup>7</sup>Do they not insult the holy name of Christ by which you are called?

<sup>8</sup>If you keep the law of the kingdom, according to Scripture: *Love your neighbor as yourself*, you do well; <sup>9</sup>but if you make distinctions between persons, you break the law, and are condemned by the same law. <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law, but fails in one aspect, is guilty of breaking it all. <sup>11</sup>For he who said, “*Do not commit adultery*,” also said, “*Do not kill*.” If, then, you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have broken the law. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, speak and behave like people who are going to be judged by the law of freedom. <sup>13</sup>There will be justice without mercy for those who have not shown mercy, whereas mercy has nothing to fear of judgment.

#### JAMES 2:1-13

**Read:** That people are made in the image and likeness of God is central to Judaism, so a true believer will treat all persons equally, without distinction, loving their neighbor as themselves.

**Reflect:** How are the preferences for the rich over the poor part of life today? How are they part of church life? What do you make of this: “For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement?”

**Pray:** O God, you created us in your image and likeness. Help us to see you in each of our brothers and sisters, especially in the faces of the poor.

**Act:** Be aware of the prejudices you have to certain groups of people. Try to overcome them by dealing with them.

### Faith is shown in action

<sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, to profess faith without showing works? Such faith has no power to save you. <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is in need of clothes or food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says, “May things go well for you; be warm and satisfied,” without attending to their material needs, what good is that? <sup>17</sup>So it is for faith without deeds: it is totally dead.

<sup>18</sup>Say to whoever challenges you, “You have faith and I have good deeds; show me your faith apart from actions and I, for my part, will show you my faith in the way I act.” <sup>19</sup>Do you believe there is one God? Well enough, but do not forget that the demons also believe, and tremble with fear!

<sup>20</sup>You foolish one, do you have to be convinced that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup>Think of our father Abraham. Was he not justified by the act of offering his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup>So you see, his faith was active, along with his deeds, and became perfect by what he did. <sup>23</sup>The word of Scripture was thus fulfilled, *Abraham believed in God so he was considered a righteous person and he was called the friend of God.*

<sup>24</sup>So you see, a person is justified by works, and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup>Likewise, we read of Rahab the prostitute, that she was acknowledged and saved because she welcomed the spies and showed them another way to leave.

<sup>26</sup>So, just as the body is dead without its spirit, so faith without deeds is also dead.

**JAMES 2:14-26**

**Read:** This text highlights the importance of having faith with deeds. Faith without deeds is a dead faith. James speaks here of the works of mercy that Christians should show toward others in their community as well as the poor and needy in general. He uses the stories of Abraham and Rahab to illustrate his point.

**Reflect:** Faith is lived from the inside out so the way we live expresses our soul. How do the Scriptures become part of your heart?

**Pray:** Lord, help me love others as I love myself and to be merciful to others as you are merciful to me.

**Act:** Work with your parish social ministry and with some social institutions that fight for justice.

**Sins of the tongue**

**3**<sup>1</sup>My brothers and sisters, don't all be teachers! You know that, as teachers, we will be judged most strictly; <sup>2</sup>in fact, we make mistakes like everybody else. A person who commits no offense in speech is perfect and capable of ruling the whole self. <sup>3</sup>We put a bit into the horse's mouth to master it and, with this, we control its whole body. <sup>4</sup>The same is true of ships: however big they are, driven by strong winds, they are guided by a tiny rudder. <sup>5</sup>In the same way, the tongue is a tiny part of the body, but it is capable of great things.

A small flame is enough to set a huge forest on fire. <sup>6</sup>The tongue is a similar flame; it is, in itself, a whole world of evil. It infects the whole being and sets fire to our world with the very fire of hell. <sup>7</sup>Wild animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures of every kind are, and have been ruled, by the human species. <sup>8</sup>Nobody, however, can control the tongue; it is an untiring whip, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup>We use it to bless God our Father, and also to curse those made in God's likeness. <sup>10</sup>From the same mouth come both blessing and curse.

Brothers and sisters, this should not be the case. <sup>11</sup>Can both fresh and saltwater gush from the same source? <sup>12</sup>Can a fig tree produce olives or a grapevine give figs? Neither is the sea able to give fresh water.

## True wisdom

<sup>13</sup>If you consider yourself wise and learned, show it by your good life, and let your actions, in all humility, be an example for others. <sup>14</sup>But if your heart is full of bitter jealousy and ambition, do not try to show off; that would be covering up the truth; <sup>15</sup>this kind of wisdom does not come from above but from the world, and it is earthly and devilish. <sup>16</sup>Wherever there are jealousy and ambition, you will also find discord, and all that is evil. <sup>17</sup>Instead, the wisdom that comes from above is pure and peace-loving. Persons with this wisdom show understanding, and listen to advice; they are full of compassion and good works; they are impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup>Peacemakers who sow peace, reap a harvest of justice.

### JAMES 3:1-18

**Read:** Not only our actions but also our words should reflect our faith. Neither destructive criticism nor gossip nor lies nor envy can contribute to making a better world.

**Reflect:** As actions reflect faith, so do what we say and what we write. Think about your day to day. Do you use words to build or to destroy? Do you talk too much sometimes? Do you work for peace or for discord?

**Pray:** May my speech praise you Lord, and reflect you in words of kindness, encouragement and peace.

**Act:** Avoid false or malicious words in your everyday conversations. Express your trust in others with words of encouragement, forgiveness, and respect.

## Wicked ambitions

**4**<sup>1</sup>What causes these fights and quarrels among you? Is it not your cravings that make war within your own selves? <sup>2</sup>When you long for something you cannot have, you kill for it, and when you do not get what you desire, you squabble and fight. The fact is, you do not have what you want because you do not pray for it. <sup>3</sup>You pray for something and you do not get it because you pray with the wrong motive of indulging your pleasures. <sup>4</sup>You adulterers! Don't you know that making friends with the world make you enemies of God? Therefore, whoever chooses to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy.



<sup>5</sup>Can you not see the point of the saying in Scripture: “The longing of the spirit he sent to dwell in us, is a jealous longing?” <sup>6</sup>But God has something better to give, and Scripture also says, “*God opposes the proud but he gives his favor to the humble.*” <sup>7</sup>Give in, then, to God; resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup>Draw close to God and he will come close to you. Clean your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you doubters. <sup>9</sup>Recognize your distress, be miserable and weep. Turn your laughter into tears and your joy into sadness. <sup>10</sup>Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will raise you up.

<sup>11</sup>Brothers and sisters, do not criticize one another. Anyone who speaks against, or condemns another, speaks against the law and condemns the law. If, however, you condemn the law, you are no longer an observer of the law, but a judge of it. <sup>12</sup>There is only one lawgiver and one judge: he who has the power to save or condemn. So you, who are you, to judge your neighbor?

#### **JAMES 4:1-12**

**Read:** Envy and rivalry divide human beings and separate them from God. Rather, we should befriend God, be loyal and humble and guided by the good.

**Reflect:** “Draw close to God and he will come close to you.” Do you humbly reach out for God or do you resist trusting Him? How is the presence of God manifested in your life?

**Pray:** Look to me with pity, Lord, and strengthen my resolve to reject evil and to get closer to you through my brothers and sisters.

**Act:** Resolve to do something concrete to help you get closer to God.

<sup>13</sup>Listen now, you who speak like this, “Today or tomorrow we will go off to this city and spend a year there; we will do business and make money.” <sup>14</sup>You have no idea what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? No more than a mist, which appears for a moment and then disappears. <sup>15</sup>Instead of this, you should say, “God willing, we will live and do this or that.” <sup>16</sup>But no! You boast of your plans: this brazen pride is wicked. <sup>17</sup>Anyone who knows what is good and does not do it, sins.

## The misfortunes of the rich

**5**<sup>1</sup>So, now, for what concerns the rich, cry and weep for the misfortunes that are coming upon you. <sup>2</sup>Your riches are rotting, and your clothes eaten up by the moths. <sup>3</sup>Your silver and gold have rusted and their rust grows into a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire, for having piled up riches in these last days.

<sup>4</sup>You deceived the workers who harvested your fields, but now, their wages cry out to the heavens. The reapers' complaints have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. <sup>5</sup>You lived in luxury and pleasure in this world, thus fattening yourselves for the day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup>You have easily condemned and killed the innocent since they offered no resistance.

## Look forward to the Lord's coming

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, then, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. See how the sower waits for the precious fruits of the earth, looking forward patiently to the autumn and spring rains. <sup>8</sup>You, also, be patient and do not lose heart, because the Lord's coming is near.

<sup>9</sup>Beloved, do not fight among yourselves and you will not be judged. See, the judge is already at the door. <sup>10</sup>Take for yourselves, as an example of patience, the suffering of the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. <sup>11</sup>See how those who were patient are called blessed. You have heard of the patience of Job and know how the Lord dealt with him in the end. *For the Lord is merciful and shows compassion.*

<sup>12</sup>Above all, my beloved, do not swear either by heaven or by earth, or make a habit of swearing. Let your *yes* be yes and your *no* be no, lest you become liable to judgment.

## The sick

<sup>13</sup>Are any among you discouraged? They should pray. Are any of you happy? They should sing songs to God. <sup>14</sup>If anyone is sick, let him call on the elders of the Church. They shall pray for him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup>The prayer said in faith will save the sick person; the Lord will raise him up and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.

<sup>16</sup>There will be healing if you confess your sins to one another, and pray for each other. The prayer of the upright man has great power, provided he perseveres. <sup>17</sup>Elijah was a human being like ourselves, and

when he prayed earnestly for it not to rain, no rain fell for three and a half years. <sup>18</sup>Then he prayed again: the sky yielded rain and the earth produced its fruit.

<sup>19</sup>Brothers, if any one of you strays far away from the truth and another person brings him back to it, <sup>20</sup>be sure of this: he who brings back a sinner from the wrong way will save his soul from death and *win forgiveness for many sins*.

### **JAMES 4:13—5:20**

**Read:** The relationship between the wealthy and the poor must be one of justice and generosity. The heart is the locus of the spirit and fattened hearts are unresponsive to the needs of others. A righteous person does not resist God, speaks with God's prophetic voice, believes through trials, and cares for others when sick and in need of forgiveness.

**Reflect:** Our closeness to God is mirrored in relationships with others. What do your actions reveal to you about your relationship with God?

**Pray:** Ask the Lord for the grace to be generous, to assist the poor, help the sick and recognize your own sins in order to lead others.

**Act:** Make a gesture for the kingdom of God: be generous to those in need, visit a sick or comfort a person who is sad.

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