

True Wisdom and Unanswered Prayer (25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

James 3:16-4:3—Heavenly Wisdom and Unanswered Prayer

¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity.* ¹⁸ And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes wars, and what causes fightings among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members? ² You desire and do not have; so you kill. And you covet and cannot obtain; so you fight and wage war. *You do not have, because you do not ask.* ³ *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* (James 3:16-4:3)

1. True vs. False Wisdom:

<i>False Wisdom</i>	<i>True Wisdom</i>
“Earthy” (Greek <i>epigeios</i>) “Unspiritual” (Greek <i>psychikē</i>)	“From above”
Selfish Bitter jealousy	Peaceable
False in the truth	Open to reason Impartial (Greek <i>adiakriotos</i>) Without insincerity (Greek <i>anypokritos</i>)
Devilish/demonic (Greek <i>daimoniōdēs</i>)	Pure
Leads to disorder and vile practices (James 3:14-15)	Leads to a harvest of righteousness (James 3:17-18)

2. True vs. False Prayer: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly” (3:3)

The Living Tradition

Bede: He... requests wickedly who, despising the commands of the Lord, desires benefits from above from the Lord; he also requests wickedly who, *having lost the love of the things above, seeks only to obtain the lower goods, and these not for the support of human frailty but for the superfluity of unnecessary pleasure.* For this is what he means when he says “that you may indulge in your concupiscences” [James 4:3]. (Bede, *Commentary on James 4:3*; trans. D. Hurst).

Catechism: “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” If we ask with a divided heart... *God cannot answer us, for he desires our well-being, our life.* (CCC 2737)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What is the difference between true and false wisdom? What is the difference between true and false prayer? Why does God sometimes not answer our prayers?

For Further Reading

1. Bede the Venerable. *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*. Translated by Dom David Hurst, OSB. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1985.
2. Kelly Anderson and Daniel Keating. *James, First, Second, and Third John*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2017.
3. Gerald Bray, ed. *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2000.