

**Looking in the Mirror**  
Fifth Sunday after Easter (Rogation Sunday)  
(from the *Epistle*: St. James 1.22)

*BE ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

In this wonderful Epistle, the hard-driving Apostle James likens the Word of God to a mirror into which we gaze, beholding our reflection. It is a curious metaphor, but what I think he is saying is that the purpose of the Word, among others, is *to reflect back to us what we actually are, while presenting to us at the same time what need to be*. No earthly mirror could ever perform such a task. Besides, our purpose in looking into mirrors may vary considerably from the model James presents here: we look in the mirror to see how we look, not to be admonished, exhorted, and urged to look like something different. Of course, we may and often do see an image with which we are not pleased. But the changes made are generally superficial: a touch up with a comb, a dab of make-up, a straightening of a tie, a bit of rearranging to hide a blemish... and off we go. On other occasions, we may be tempted to gaze at our reflection, admiring what we see, making the mirror the occasion of vanity: "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?". But the image that God's Word reflects back to us is unrelentingly clear, unclouded, and, in a sense, quite unmerciful in what it reveals.

James points out to us the absurdity of misusing the powers of a mirror, as he exhorts us to proper interaction with the Scripture. There would be no point in looking at our reflection, unless we do something about what we see. That gaze over the sink in the morning is, in its way, a real meeting with ourselves. We allow it, not because we necessarily enjoy it, but because it has a function: we intend to *do* something about what we see. It would be more than strange if one of us, after having taken that fateful look, *beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was*. No, God leads us to gaze into the Scriptures for the purpose of transformation. Chances are, after having been confronted with the truth about ourselves with all of the uncomfortable implications associated with it, we may wish to forget it and do nothing about it. That would make us *forgetful hearers*, and not a *doer of the work*. The mirror of God's Word, instead of saying "You are the fairest of them all", says: "Hey, you, come back here! Did you see what I showed you. Why did you shut your eyes? Do you really want to look your best? Then this is what you must do!"

When we open our heart to God's Word, says James, we *looketh into the perfect law of liberty*. What a beautiful phrase: *the perfect law of liberty*. Its purpose is to free us of everything that binds us. It rids us of all lies, deceit, misunderstanding, ignorance, and false teaching. Within its pages resides all that we need to live our Christian life to the fullest. It is infinitely practical, and infinitely sublime. It instructs us about Earth, and tells us about Heaven. When skillfully taught and preached, it clears the air of all spiritual pollution. *O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day* exclaimed the psalmist (Ps. 119:97).

We look into God's mirror every time we are exposed to God's Word, without exception. And when it's held up before us, we must struggle to resist the temptation to alter its angle, adjust it a little bit like the rear-view mirror of a car, so that other faces are reflected in it, and not our own: "Why, what I'm seeing here certainly doesn't reflect me accurately, but it absolutely is a reflection of the face of Mr. Somebody-Else. Why, it's his spitting image!" No, it is I. I recognize all too well the features, and they are spiritual ones. It's not the length of the nose, the color of the eyes, and every other physical identifier that I see. It's my all too familiar brokenness, those parts of me that are still very much under construction, those things that mar my character, my pet sins, that make up this very blemished countenance which stares back at me.

Now here's where choice comes in. I can be dismissive of that which has been revealed, and *goeth my way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man I was*: "I'm no exception. Everyone has his weaknesses. I'll work on these things when I get around to it." Or I can run off quickly in a state of panic, despairing that there is any hope for a fix. I can avoid any return to the mirror at all, for sheer terror at the experience. Or I can rivet myself to the spot, and not only acknowledge the image I see, and the implications for change that come with it, but welcome more and more of the same. The longer I look, the more complete will be the process of transformation. It is I alone that impede its progress. After a while, I should arrive at the point where I conclude that there is no better place for me than to be looking into God's Word, in order to both know and perform His will. I will even be fighting for the best seat in front of it!

Should we prove to be both hearers and doers of the Word, James promises that we *shall be blessed in our deed*. Stop and think about that promise, for a minute. Implied here is success of the most enduring kind, and a life filled with the approving presence of God. Blessed in our relationships. Blessed in our business. Blessed in our quiet times and rest. Others will see that there is no disconnect between what we present ourselves to be outwardly and what they know us to be inwardly. Our *religion will be pure and undefiled*, and in an age that doubts the sincerity of the Christian church, we will be testimony to the opposite.

Keep looking into that mirror. You'll notice a change, if you follow James' instructions. That image reflected back at you is growing in grace and beauty. You are becoming what you've

always wanted to be. You see the results reflected even in the faces of those who surround you, as if they also were mirrors that are revealing to you what you are becoming for them.

Here is the very endpoint of this process, as the Apostle John promised: *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is* (1 John 3:2).

*In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*