



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

St. James has some harrowing words for us in the second reading today. He reminds us that all of the riches of this world are fleeting. So often we seek to have lots of money and lots of things so that we can be secure... or at least feel secure. Yet, no matter how much money we have, we will never escape suffering, we will never overcome death. We can try to create a sense of security by padding our lives with comfort, but, in the end, all will disappear.

St. James also warns us that if we deprive others in order to make our lives easier (withholding wages from workers, etc.), *we will be judged for that*. It should make us stop and think about what is most important.

I think of St. Francis of Assisi (whose feast we celebrate next week). He grew up in the merchant class, which today would be upper-middle class. He had *plenty*. After some hardship and suffering in his life, and as he grew closer to God, he came to realize that his riches were not making him happy. In response to this, he embraced "Lady Poverty," letting go of ownership of

everything. While he continued to have many, many hardships, he found a great freedom and joy in this poverty! Below is one of my favorite quotes of St. Francis, which reveals from where true joy comes.

Suppose a messenger comes and tells me that all the Masters in the University of Paris have come to join the order: that is not true happiness. Suppose that all the prelates beyond the Alps, all the archbishops and bishops have come to join the order, suppose that the kings of France and England have come too: that is not true happiness. Suppose that my brethren have gone to the unbelievers and converted them all to the faith; suppose that I have such grace from God that I heal the sick and work many miracles: I tell you that in all of these true happiness does not reside. So what is true happiness? I am on my way back from Perugia and I arrive here later at night, and it is the muddy time of winter and so cold that there are icicles hanging from the bottom of my tunic, which keep striking my legs so that they are wounded and bleeding. All muddy and cold and covered in ice, I arrive at the door and when I have knocked at the door and shouted for a long time, at last the brother comes and asks, "Who is it?" I reply, "It's brother Francis." He says, "Go away, this is no time for traveling. You can't come in." I plead with him, but he repeats, "Go away; you're an ignorant simpleton. You are certainly not going to come in here with us; we have quite enough people here and they are quite good enough, we do not need you." Once more I stand at the door, saying "For the love of God, take me in just for this night." But he says, "I won't. Go to the Crutched Friars and ask there." I tell you, if I have patience and am not upset, this is where true happiness lies, and true virtue and the salvation of my soul.

It is not in hoarding up wealth in this life in which lies true happiness, but in building up virtue, for the *habit* of goodness (which is the definition of virtue) is what allows true happiness to reign in our souls. How do we get this? By begging God for the grace to grow in virtue, and then... practice, practice, practice. Since virtue is a habit, it is only gained by repetition, and trying again when we fail (and we will).

May we truly seek the heart of God, looking beyond the comforts of this world for the true joy we can experience here and now, and in the here-after.