

Daily Office Devotional, Monday, May 10, 2021
The week of the sixth Sunday of Easter
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. (See below.)

Daily Office Lectionary readings

AM Psalm 80; PM Psalm 77, [79]

Deuteronomy 8:1-10 ; James 1:1-15; Luke 9:18-27

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Epistle, James 1:1-15

1:1 James, a servant* of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

2 My brothers and sisters,* whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; 4 and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. 6 But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; 7, 8 for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

9 Let the believer* who is lowly boast in being raised up, 10 and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

12 Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord* has promised to those who love him. 13 No one, when tempted, should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. 14 But one is

tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; 15then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.

David's Reflections

These opening verses of The Epistle of James reveal a complex and positive view of God's nature. First, this God sustains us through trials and adversity into a larger place. We are encouraged to anticipate that inevitable ending when we enter a time of adversity, like the loss of a job, a serious illness, and so forth. No matter what the trial, and no matter how demanding and tough, we are encouraged to celebrate in advance the maturity and depth that God will create through such adversity.

We humans are complex enough that we can allow the reality of our circumstances to generate anxiety and fear while at the same time celebrating what we know will be the ultimate positive outcome. We are not being told to escape reality into some sort of fantasy world of praise; rather, we are being told to allow celebration and hope to coexist with the anxiety and despair any trial produces.

Also, our God gives generously and does not reproach or shame us. The word translated "ungrudgingly" in verse 5 renders a verb that describes insulting or shaming behavior. So, if we admit that we lack the wisdom to live through a difficult time and/or to make tough decisions and ask God for guidance, God will pour wisdom out on us, regardless of who we are (God gives to all). And, God will do that without reproaching or shaming us for our lack and our failures I normally have learned by asking for wisdom by having failed to do so and gotten myself into difficulties and failure as a result.

If we doubt God's generosity and giving nature, we set up a dynamic that limits our capacity to receive. It is not that God withholds from those who doubt. The biblical record consistently presents God as an encourager in moments of doubt (Exodus 3-4; Jeremiah 1; Matthew 11; Luke 24, John 20). Rather, our uncertainty, our wavering between faith and doubt, limits our ability to ask boldly and to receive what God eagerly desires to give.

James also presents God as one who overturns and reverses achieved status. The rich who acquire by exploitation will be brought low and those disempowered and impoverished by that exploitation will be enriched and

blessed by God. We here echoes of Jesus' beatitudes here (Matthew 5; Luke 6), for example, "Blessed are you poor, for your is the Kingdom of God (Luke 6).

If we are tempted to trace our trials to God's hand ("Why did God . . .?"), this passage tells us that our trials do not come from God. We face many tests in life. A test becomes a temptation when our faith and our loyalty are threatened, when the test draws us away from God. Without mentioning Satan as a source, James reminds us that ultimately the temptations arise from within us when the test awakens desire in our lower nature. We don't need demonic allure to feel tempted; we can accomplish that on our own.

Today's reading reminds us to look beneath the passages in Scripture for the view of God they present. We are not to assume that the biblical writings, produced over a span of more than fifteen hundred years, all reflect an equally elevated conception of God. Each generation stood on the shoulders of the previous one and saw more fully into the divine nature, while faithfully preserving the witness of previous generations in the stories and interpretations that became our Holy Scriptures. The witness of Jesus, the Apostles, and the New Testament writers brings us to the fulfillment of the previous witnesses, their understandings and their hopes for salvation.

Collect of the Day, The Sixth Sunday of Easter

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Collect of the Weekdays of Easter

Almighty God, you show the light of your truth to those who are in error, to the intent that they may return to the way of righteousness: Grant to those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to it; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Today we celebrate the Feast of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, prophetic witness (died 9 May 1760 CE).

Collect of the Feast of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf

God of new life in Christ: We remember the bold witness of your servant Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, through whom your Spirit moved to draw many to faith and conversion of life. We pray that we, like him, may rejoice to sing your praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for the Renewal of Life

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 99)

Of the Holy Angels

Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals: Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven, so by your appointment they may help and defend us here on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 251)

A Prayer for Light

Almighty God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vesper light; and we implore you of your great mercy that, as you enfold us with the radiance of this light, so you would shine into our hearts the brightness of your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of your faithful people is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.* (BCP, 100)