

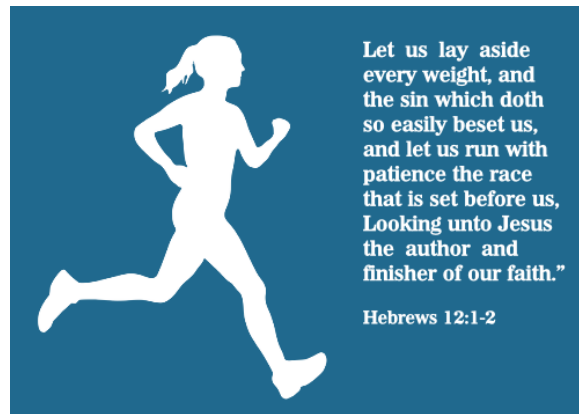
## The Homily

*“May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen”*

We are poised on the cusp of some very major spiritual events in the Christian Calendar. Thursday is Ascension Day, one of the most significant days of our year, and the other follows a week and a half later – the great Feast of Pentecost, and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon the early church. They are the culmination of the earthly life and ministry of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and really, we should be tremendously excited by them.....

The problem for many of us, is that our lives become cluttered with many things, all important in their own way, but often distractions from our core spiritual journey. Ascension will sneak up on most of us, as it falls during the week, and we will only realize when it is over, and so, too, with Pentecost. Both these momentous historical and theological events will be forced into a brief passing reflection, when in fact, they require intense scrutiny and contemplation.

Lent 2021 has tried to emphasise the need for a consistent and systematic approach to spiritual things; nothing random and ‘bitty’, but rather a determined, step by step forward movement in the way of holiness. Lent was the time to clear out some of our distractions and wasteful excesses, and deepen our love of Jesus, our intimacy with Him, and to begin the process of conforming our lives to His high standard of ‘being’.



Some of us may have achieved this, by Gods Grace, but for many, we have continued headlong on our preferred course – skilfully pushing God’s demands to the back regions of our consciousness, and allowing only that which we can manage to come in. It has been an exercise in deceit; deceit towards our Lord Jesus Christ and even worse, deceit of ourselves.

James was aware of this habit in the lives of early Christians and so he wrote:

*“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves...” (James 1:22)*

James was aware that often people deceive themselves with a deliberate lie, just as they would deceive a friend, because they cannot face the fact that at the deepest level...they have failed.

We can *think* about prayer and holiness, or *contemplate* fasting as a spiritual discipline, and about *loving* my neighbour, but unless we put these things into practice, and actually perform the action in the reality of our lives, we deceive our own selves. In truth; we engage in an act of monumental stupidity, for we will be frustrated and guilt-ridden, and also deeply aware that our all-seeing Lord is deeply disappointed in our willfulness.

We cannot cheat our way into the Kingdom of God, my dear brothers and sisters. The Gatekeepers are too wise and too knowledgeable of those who are approaching.... Only an open and honest heart will be acceptable on that Day... all else will be burned away like so much dross under the fierce gaze of the One, who knows all and sees all....

James goes on to give a short verse on pureness of religious life. He says:

*“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.”*

He makes faith as simple as possible to ensure that the believer grasps the truth and practices it in his or her life on a daily basis. James makes the demands small, so that deceit can disappear and true Christian values

can begin to emerge. He does not demand an impossible set of values all at once, just simple Faith, and love in action.

We are all aware that Our Lord desires each one of us to attain perfection of life and spirit – and that no deceit can live in His presence. That is why James is so earnest about warning the new converts to the faith against a life built on illusion and not on truth.

James urges us to stop the deceit and begin the actions of an honest believing Christian; simple!

In today's Gospel, Jesus is once again preparing His disciples for His approaching Death, Resurrection, Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost. Just like them, we are to prepare ourselves – for the Holy Spirit will not take up residence in a house that is furnished with deceit and lies.

In the coming days, we should try to concentrate on preparing a place that is a fitting dwelling for the Holy Spirit. We should confess our sins, and seek ways to deepen our walk of faith by approaching our clergy or other more experienced Christians.

There can be no blessing more profound than the indwelling of the presence of the Holy Ghost in the life of a Christian. His divine light and energizing presence is what every believer most desires and needs...and so we are to clear away all distractions, all the things of the world, and seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.....we will find that all the things we strive so hard to achieve will be added unto us, if it be His perfect will.

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