
21 TUESDAYTuesday, 7th Week of Ordinary TimeJames 4:1-10
Ps 54: 7-11, 23
Mark 9: 30-37

The letter of St James, (the first reading during these two weeks of the year), comes like a breath of fresh air. Very simple, clear, direct, forceful and down-to-earth, it demands attention. And today's section of it is specially relevant to prayer. James talks about "desires" and the conflict of different desires in our hearts, which affect the way we behave and treat others. St Ignatius Loyola also emphasises the importance of "desires" when we pray. "Desires" are not simply the things we want and ask for, but also the basic motivation for any prayer, praise or gratefulness or giving glory and offering to God. What do I most want to do, or to ask for ?. What are my deepest longings and desires in conversation with God ? What requests do I make in prayer ? What fruit or result do I expect from praying ? Indeed we pray for many things, and we know we sometimes don't get the things we ask for. We have a problem about "unanswered" prayer. Jesus said: "Ask and you shall receive", but even St James, who himself heard the Lord speaking, recognises that prayers are not always "answered". It's because, he says, we haven't prayed 'properly', we've asked for something simply to indulge our own desires. But what does 'praying properly' mean ? and when are desires simply selfish ? A good test might be to try to fit our desires and what we ask for into one or other part of the model-prayer that Jesus taught: *holy* be Your Name, Your *kingdom* come, Your *will* be done... *Give* us this day... *forgive* us.... *Lead* us not.... *Deliver* us....

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