

Feast of St. James

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Preacher: Seminarian Ian Jarrells

[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Today we celebrate the feast of St. James the Greater. Now this James is not the same one that was the Bishop of Jerusalem, also known as James the Lesser or James the Just.

The one we are focusing on today is the brother of John. James and John were the sons of Zebedee. These two were some of the fishermen that were called by Jesus to follow him at the beginning of his ministry.

Leaving everything they knew, from the fishing business to their friends and family, they decided to follow after Christ. Jesus ended up giving them a new name, the Sons of Thunder.

We wonder why they were given that name, and then we come to the Gospel text that describes the events after the transfiguration of our Lord. Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem when they passed through a Samaritan village.

[1 : 13] They did not receive him, however, because they knew that he was on his way to the Jews. When James and John realized that the Samaritans were not accepting the Gospel of our Lord, they asked Jesus if he wanted them to command fire to come down from heaven and consume the Samaritans.

He paid no mind to them. They had quite the zeal, and just like thunder, it was quite loud. The main focus of our attention towards St. James is recorded in our Gospel and Epistle text for today.

In our Gospel text, the mother of James and John come to Christ and ask him if he would have them sit on his right and left in his kingdom. Jesus asks the two brothers, as if he already knows that they are probably the ones that put her up to this task, if they know exactly what they are asking for.

Can they drink the cup that Christ is going to drink? Can they take on the suffering that Christ is going to experience? Both James and John say that they can.

Christ then responds by saying that they will indeed drink of the cup. Well, if we follow the life of St. James, we learn that he did end up drinking the cup. Well, chapter 12 of the book of Acts records the martyrdom of St. James.

[2 : 38] He was beheaded by Herod Agrippa. St. Peter was also martyred, according to the text. We are grateful for their sacrifice and their service to our Lord. There are two things that we can take away from the life of St. James today.

The first takeaway is to be constantly ready to follow after Christ. St. James and his brother John were both occupied with fishing when they received the call. It was their livelihood, their way of providing for themselves and their families.

How then do we follow him, since Christ is not presently ministering in the same way that he did in the gospel text? For a moment, consider the final judgment text in St. Matthew's gospel.

Jesus describes to the disciples what the day will be like when he comes back in glory. All peoples and nations will be separated and grouped into the righteous and in the unrighteous.

To the righteous, he says that whenever he was hungry, they gave him food. Whenever he was thirsty, they gave him drink. Whenever he was a stranger, they welcomed him in. They were confused because they didn't remember doing these things for him.

[3 : 50] He responds by saying, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Now, it's easy to read this passage and think that our Lord is talking about those who are Christians and in need. However, it has been traditionally understood that those in need in this passage are referring to anyone who is in need.

For Christ has compassion and has solidarity with all mankind by virtue of his humanity. Amidst those in the world who are struggling, who are hungry, thirsty, who are in need, is Christ. Whatever we do or do not do is done unto Christ. We should not consider ourselves to be more important than those who are in need. When someone asks us for help, we should offer it willingly. Following the example of St. James, whenever the opportunity to help those in need presents itself, we should set aside the things we are doing and follow after Christ. The second thing that we can take away from the life of St. James is a correct understanding of suffering in our lives, whether as individuals or the communities that we are involved in.

[5 : 05] When James and John told Christ that they could drink the cup that Jesus was going to drink at his crucifixion, Jesus said that they would indeed drink the cup. The Acts of the Apostles recounts that St. James was martyred by Herod along with St. Peter.

They drank the cup to the dregs. In their drinking of the cup, they found themselves hid with the suffering of Christ. They did not suffer without reason or purpose.

Their suffering allowed them to participate in the love that Jesus on the cross expressed towards the Father and to the whole world. We too, when we experience suffering, can understand the purpose and love that Christ's suffering displayed.

When we put to death the sins in our lives, we can say with confidence that we are working out our salvation with fear and trembling, because we participate in the death that Jesus did.

When we crucify our sins, we can look back to our baptism with confidence and say that we have died with Christ, so that we may be raised with him. When we follow after Christ when he calls, dropping our activities in service of his brothers and sisters, and find our suffering wrapped in the divine love of the Son of God, we can say that we are following in the footsteps of the holy apostle St. James.

[6 : 28] St. Paul told the Corinthians to imitate himself as he imitated Christ. Considering the martyrdom of St. James, we can be confident that he was received into glory at his death.

We should pray for his continued growth in Christ, but not only that, we should follow the example that he has laid out for us. Grant, O merciful God, that as thine holy apostle St. James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son, Jesus Christ, and followed him, so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be ever more ready to follow thy holy commandments through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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