

JAMES THE ELDER

Feast Day 25 July



There are two readings in this week's Gospel reflections., both concerning St James whose feast day was July 25th. Many thanks to Bishop John Henderson for many of the ideas in these reflections which he shared in a recent devotion.

Mark 10:33-45 (GNB)

³³ "Listen," he told them, "we are going up to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and then hand him over to the Gentiles,³⁴ who will mock him, spit on him, whip him, and kill him; but three days later he will rise to life."

³⁵ Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus. "Teacher," they said, "there is something we want you to do for us."

³⁶ "What is it?" Jesus asked them.

³⁷ They answered, "When you sit on your throne in your glorious Kingdom, we want you to let us sit with you, one at your right and one at your left."

³⁸ Jesus said to them, "You don't know what you are asking for. Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?"

³⁹ "We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink the cup I must drink and be baptized in the way I must be baptized.⁴⁰ But I do not have the right to choose who will sit at my right and my left. It is God who will give these places to those for whom he has prepared them.”

⁴¹ When the other ten disciples heard about it, they became angry with James and John.⁴² So Jesus called them all together to him and said, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the heathen have power over them, and the leaders have complete authority.⁴³ This, however, is not the way it is among you. If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest;⁴⁴ and if one of you wants to be first, he must be the slave of all.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people.”



Acts 11:27 – 12:3a (GNB)

²⁷ About that time some prophets went from Jerusalem to Antioch.²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and by the power of the Spirit predicted that a severe famine was about to come over all the earth. (It came when Claudius was emperor.)²⁹ The disciples decided that they would each send as much as they could to help their fellow-believers who lived in Judea.³⁰ They did this, then, and sent the money to the church elders by Barnabas and Saul.

^{12:1} About this time King Herod began to persecute some members of the church.² He had James, the brother of John, put to death by the sword.³ When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he went on to arrest Peter.

Let's reflect

James was the first of the apostles to be martyred and the only one whose death was recorded in the Bible, as we have seen in the passage from Acts. The placing of these two readings together: the request of James and John to be seated next to Jesus and the account of the death of James, raises some questions.

Why do James and John ask their question in the first place? Haven't they been listening to Jesus?

Why is James executed, but Peter escapes?

Does James really know what he is asking for? Was he thinking only of sharing in the presumed glory of Jesus, or did he understand the suffering that was to come?

Jesus certainly mentions, in detail, what will happen when he and the disciples arrive in Jerusalem. Although James and John make their request after Jesus explains how he will suffer and die, it still seems as if they are dazzled by thoughts of a grand throne and a glorious kingdom.

Jesus, however, knows they do not understand what they ask, nor do they understand what he means when he asks: *“Can you drink the cup of suffering that I must drink? Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?”*

However, what follows their appeal for special favours is one of the greatest leadership teachings in the Bible. Jesus turns the whole idea of worldly leadership upside down. True

leaders, Jesus explains, serve. True leadership is not about power or authority or thrones, or who sits where; it is servant hood.

As for what happened to James, we know he was beheaded by Herod who had found that persecuting the Church pleased the Jews of that time. This is what also led him to arrest and jail Peter. Herod had been facing some difficult times balancing Roman and Jewish cultures as well as managing an economy frequently interrupted by famine. So, like all good politicians he was prepared to keep the Jews happy to deflect from the shortcomings of his own rule.

Surely by the time of his death James not only understood what Jesus meant when he said; "Can you be baptized in the way I must be baptized?" but had also come to understand that in following Jesus he had come also to serve. James' footsteps were also the footsteps of Jesus.

The death of James compared with the escape of Peter from prison may seem strange from a worldly perspective but James had fulfilled God's purpose. The death of James also demonstrates how much the world was struggling, and still struggles, with the message of the Gospel. Peter's escape with the help of God's angel, however, was a sign that the authorities were unable to halt the spread of that very Gospel.

Like James we too follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We too, need to be prepared at any time for the tide to turn against us in our churches, or in our schools. We also need to know what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to discover the joy as well as the pain that comes in serving our Lord and Saviour.

The Servant Song; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9atbM9FNyc>

**Almighty Father,
by the martyrdom of St James
you blessed the work of the early Church.**

**May his example of faith and witness
strengthen our courage to serve you.**

**Teach us, Jesus our Saviour,
to live with patience here on earth,
confident that you will finally take us,
with all your faithful people,
to be with you forever.**

**For you live and reign
with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.**

Amen.

