

25 July 2026 - Feast of Saint James

2 Cor 4, 7-15; Mt 20, 20-28

Homily

There are several James in the New Testament. The one we are celebrating today is the brother of John and son of Zebedee. This James was one of the first martyrs. Herod had him put to death during the first great persecution against the Church, even before Peter's arrest. Along with his brother John, who was also a companion of Peter, he held a very special place in the public life of Jesus. Along with John, he was one of the first disciples to ask Jesus "Master, where are you staying? He was one of those whom Jesus took with him to the Mount of Transfiguration, to the room where he raised Jairus' daughter from the dead and, finally, to the Garden of Olives.

In the Gospel we have just read, James and John come to Jesus with their mother, who was one of the women who followed Jesus, and whom we will meet again on Calvary, at the moment of the Lord's death (Matt 27:56). It is important to remember that the scene we are told today takes place immediately after Jesus' third announcement of his passion and resurrection. So the two disciples and their mother are not thinking of an ordinary earthly kingdom, but know that they are talking about a future kingdom. What they are asking for is not simply a position of honour. They are asking to be closely associated with the exercise of his authority. Jesus does not rebuke them in any way; and when He asks them if they may drink the chalice that He is about to drink, it seems that they understand that it is His death and passion that He is talking about.

The reaction of the other Apostles gives Jesus the opportunity to explain once again, as he will do again at the Last Supper, the meaning of authority in his Kingdom, that is, in the Church. "The rulers of the Gentiles have them under their power and the great ones under their dominion. It must not be so among you", says Jesus. And he explains that all authority in his kingdom must be pure service, because the Son of Man came precisely not to be served but to serve and, he adds, to give his life as a ransom.

In a monastic community such as ours, structured according to the Rule of Saint Benedict, it is important for each member of the community, whatever his or her functions, small or large, to remember this message of Jesus, and to be constantly in an attitude of mutual and disinterested service.

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