

ST. JAMES APOSTLE/VIII TRINITY 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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“Mrs. Zebedee’s Request” might be a good title for the Gospel for Saint James’ Day. Her request begs the question...“Does God play favorites?” She apparently thought so. The answer she got was more than she bargained for.

Mothers want what’s best for their children. Mrs. Zebedee was no exception. In today’s Gospel, she asks Jesus to do her a great favor...make certain her terrific sons get the best seats in the house and rule right along side him in his kingdom.

Saint Mark tells the story a bit differently...he has James and John Zebedee asking Jesus the question. Whether they or their mother asked Jesus the question, we know they were the source, since the answer Jesus gave is directed at them and not their mother.

What the Gospel tells us is that neither Mrs. Zebedee nor her sons had a clue what Jesus meant when he talked about “his kingdom”. They were still looking for another King David. The Kingdom of Heaven was not on their minds...at least not yet.

Jesus tells James and John they have no idea what they are asking. He asks them if they are prepared to go through everything he is about to go through...to suffer and die. When they answer they are prepared, Jesus tells them that’s a good thing they are prepared and to not concern themselves with getting the best seats in his kingdom...that’s up to God.

The other ten disciples were outraged...and maybe a bit jealous...they hadn’t asked the question first. That set the stage for what Jesus says next. If they really want to be his disciples...selfishness and ambition have to go away...replaced by humility and selfless service. Discipleship means following Jesus’ example and understanding he came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life to redeem many.

Does God play favorites? It’s almost impossible to talk about James Zebedee without including his younger brother John and their friend Peter. They were to become the Inner Circle of Jesus’ most trusted and

closest friends. They alone were present when he raised the official’s daughter from the dead. They alone were witnesses to the Transfiguration. They alone were with him in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died.

James and John Zebedee had worked in the family fishing business since they were young boys. They worked hard...and they played hard. They had earned a reputation around town for being loud and impulsive hotheads. When Jesus called his twelve disciples together, he nicknamed James and John...“Boanerges”...“Sons of Thunder”. It’s not hard to imagine James and John letting off some steam at the Bethsaida Bar and Grill. They trusted Jesus and left everything to follow him. He promised them they would catch people instead of fish.

Luke tells us on one occasion Jesus and his disciples were passing through a Samaritan town. The Samaritans told them to go away...they weren’t welcome. James and John thought it would be a good idea to teach the Samaritans a lesson and call down fire from the skies to destroy them. Jesus rebuked James and John and told them he came to save people not kill them. It was a lesson in humility and patience!

James Zebedee preached the Good News for a short 10 years. In 44 AD, Herod Agrippa I had James arrested and executed. James was the first of the Twelve Apostles to suffer martyrdom and the only Apostle whose death is recorded in Holy Scripture. 4th Century Church historian Eusebius relates the touching story of the policeman who arrested James and who was secretly a Christian. He asked James to forgive him and confessed his belief in Jesus to Herod. He died along with James.

James Zebedee was a hothead...but Jesus saw something in him. He was the right man for the job...to go out and catch people. He struggled with humility. So do we. That’s the principle lesson we should take away from today’s Gospel.

Does God play favorites? In heaven there is no such thing as a better seat...they are all the best seats. Our job now is to learn how to be better disciples and serve others...like Jesus...who came not to be served but to serve...and gave his life to redeem many.

