

St. James the Apostle 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Acts 11.27-12.3 St. Matthew 20.20-29



Mothers are supposed to want what is best for their children. Mrs. Zebedee was no exception. She wanted to make certain her two boys, James and John, had the best seats in the house when Jesus became King. That was some request!

Mrs. Zebedee appears briefly in the Gospels as a follower of Jesus. She was the Salome who was present at the Crucifixion. She was likely one of the women who had the resources to help support Jesus and the Disciples during our Lord's public ministry.

Salome went too far when she asked Jesus to promise her he would let her wonderful kids sit on his right side and left side, the places of honor reserved for royalty and important people. Anyone who has watched Queen Elizabeth II open Parliament will see who is sitting on her right and left sides. We get the idea of what Salome was asking.

Saint Mark has James and John asking Jesus to guarantee they get the best seats in the house. Whether they made the request for themselves, or had their mother make the request for them, it was an outrageous request. Jesus told them so..."You don't know what you are asking for."

Jesus then asks James and John if they are prepared to endure the same kind of suffering he was about to endure? James and John answered, "Yes!" They did not understand Jesus was telling them there was a cost for being his Disciples. They would learn the truth of what Jesus told them later.

Jesus then claims to have no right to say who gets to sit on his right and left side in heaven. Jesus is submitting his human nature to his Father and leaving any seating arrangements in heaven up to him. It is a profound act of humility the Disciples could not possibly have understood. They were expecting Jesus to be another King David, not God's Son.

We can understand the other Disciples getting angry with James and John for making themselves out to be more important than the others. Jesus seizes on the opportunity to give a further lesson in humility, and it is a basic

message of Christianity...we are here to serve others through our work...just as Jesus came to serve us through his work..."and to give his life to redeem many people."

James and his brother John and their friend Peter would go on to become Jesus' inner circle...his closest friends. They were the only ones with Jesus when he healed Jairus' daughter. They were the only witnesses to the Transfiguration. They were the only ones who were with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he died.

They seem like the least likely candidates to be Apostles and the Church's first bishops. They were just ordinary fishermen. James and John had a reputation around town of being loud and impulsive hotheads. Jesus would later give them the nickname *Boanerges...The Thunder Boys*. That's precisely the point. The fact they were ordinary people like us gets our attention.

James the Apostle, whose day we celebrate today, went on to become the first Bishop of Jerusalem. His ministry was short. He did indeed suffer for following Jesus. According to Acts, James was the first Apostle to die for Jesus and the only Apostle whose martyrdom is recorded in the New Testament.

There is a touching story about the policeman who arrested James. He was so convinced by James' preaching at his trial, he asked James to forgive him, confessed his belief in Jesus, and died along with James. James was a "Thunder Boy" to the end.

Saint James is an example for us to follow. Statues and icons often depict him looking up to heaven in ecstasy. They are powerful visual reminders of Saint James the Thunder Boy, his willingness to leave everything and follow Jesus, and his martyrdom. What makes him so believable is his humanity, even that impulsive hotheadedness he struggled to control all his life.

Let's ask ourselves...are we willing to become "Thunder Men and Women" for Jesus?

