

## James

24 7 16

Merciful God,  
whose holy apostle Saint James  
leaving his father and all that he had  
was obedient to the calling of your Son Jesus Christ  
and followed him even to death:  
help us, forsaking the false attractions of the world,  
to be ready at all times to answer your call without delay.

Our text today may be found in opening verse of the Epistle of James:

**'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.'**

Tomorrow, July 25<sup>th</sup>, is the feast of St James. So my question this morning – how many New Testament Apostles called James can you name ?

Three would be reasonable:

- ✓ James, son of Zebedee, brother of John;
- ✓ James, son of Alphaeus, brother of Matthew;
- ✓ James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.

James, son of Zebedee, brother of John, together nicknamed Boanerges – sons of thunder – was a fisherman from Galilee, one of the inner circle of three (Peter, James and John) privileged to witness the Transfiguration and the raising of

Jairus's daughter. He is the St James whose remains are said to have been laid to rest in Compostella. I love the legend tells us that after James had been executed on the orders of King Herod Agrippa, his corpse was set adrift in a boat from Joppa and currents bore him across the Mediterranean to Spain.

James, the Son of Alphaeus, could well be brother to Matthew, the tax collector. In Mark 2 v14, we read that Matthew, whom Mark calls Levi, also had a father called Alphaeus, so it is reasonable to assume that they were brothers. Apart from that, very little else is known about him except to distinguish him from James of Compostella, he is called James the Less whereas John's brother is called James the Great. He shares a feast day on May 3<sup>rd</sup> with St Philip, the friend of our patron Saint, Bartholomew.

James, the brother of Jesus, was a leader of the early church in Jerusalem and he's mentioned in Acts. He is the most likely author of the Epistle of James from which our text today is taken. According to Josephus, it is likely that James was martyred in Jerusalem in 62AD on the orders of the Jewish High Priest, Ananus.

Three Apostles named James and although tomorrow is the feast of St James the Great, I'd like today to consider James the brother of Jesus. Now according to Mark 6 v3, Jesus had four brothers (James, Joses, Judas and Simon) and several unnamed sisters. But Catholics and Protestants differ in their understanding of what that means precisely. The question is though Joseph is their father, is Mary their mother? Catholics believe that Mary remained a virgin, never having sex with her husband so these brothers and sisters must be Joseph's by a previous

marriage and are, therefore, older than Jesus. The advantage of this view is that the mother of God is made more holy and pure, her womb uniquely reserved for the Son of God. Protestants cite Matthew 1 v25, that Mary did not know Joseph in a carnal sense of the word until after Jesus' birth so thereafter being fully a wife to Joseph, she is understandably the mother of his children, upholding the sanctity of marriage rather than embodying the example of chastity. If Jesus' siblings are younger than him, it would explain why Jesus waited to start his public ministry, supporting his family as a carpenter after his father's death.

If James is Mary and Joseph's biological son, then James, like his siblings, shares with Jesus some of their common physical heritage – they are of one flesh and of one blood, at least as far as their mother is concerned. Ordinary human beings can literally be the brothers and sisters of the Son of God.

So let us rejoice that James and Jesus are brothers, however we might interpret the exact nature of that relationship. Let us also rejoice that we, embodied in the flesh, can, through the welcome presence of the Holy Spirit in us, through our life and our vocation, we too can be brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist  
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