

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly beloved,

James was called to be a disciple of Jesus along with his brother John, and Peter their business partner. In the lists of the 12 apostles, he is always listed in connection with his brother John, and these two, along with Peter were specifically selected by Jesus to witness certain things, for example: the raising of Jairus' daughter, Jesus' transfiguration, & Jesus praying in Gethsemane.

But as close as he was to Jesus, we have no direct quotes from him individually.

Instead we have a couple of occasions, such as our text, when he and John spoke to Jesus together.

---

*We read selected portions of the Gospel of St. Mark, chapter 10 as follows in Jesus' name:*

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to Him and said to Him, ... "Grant us to sit, one at Your right hand and one at Your left, in Your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to Him, "We are able." ... And Jesus ... said to them, "... whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen.* (John 17:17)

---

You would think that after spending 3 years with Jesus, listening to Him teach, seeing how He treated others, how He comported Himself with both friends and antagonists, seeing the kindness, generosity, and humility of this perfect man, that more of it would have rubbed off on the disciples, especially James and his brother John. But that is not the picture that we get in this text, is it?

In fact, that picture gets even more sad when you realize that this account takes place in the last few months, if not weeks, before Jesus' death.

And His disciples were really struggling against their sinful natures.

After His transfiguration in Galilee, Jesus **set His face toward Jerusalem**, toward His sacrificial death.

But the disciples were wrapped up in themselves and concerned more about their name and prestige, their own place of honor and authority among the disciples, among the people, and before Jesus.

In Mark 9<sup>[33-37]</sup> Jesus caught the disciples **arguing with one another about who was the greatest**.

Then<sup>[9:38-39]</sup>, John, it would seem, was trying to protect the disciples' status when he noted to Jesus that he had told a man who was not one of the 12 to stop casting out demons in Jesus' name.

Yet Jesus told him, "**Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in My name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.**"<sup>[9:38-39]</sup>

As they were passing through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem to Jesus' cross, one of the villages did not receive Jesus.

James and John, hoping to play a little "Elijah the prophet," together said,

**"Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"**<sup>Luke9:54</sup>

But Jesus rebuked their harm-seeking spirit immediately.

And now turning to our text, we see that among the disciples there existed the desire for superiority over all others, not just over the people of their day, not just over the other disciples, but over the great prophets of old, like Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and Daniel. They wanted to be the 2nd and 3rd greatest in God's kingdom, right beside Jesus' Himself.

On the plus side, this is a demonstration that they truly believed that Jesus is the Son of God. But consider the pride that such a request displays, and the brazenness they must have had taking Jesus aside, knowing this request would naturally upset the other 10 disciples. They were overcome by temptation to use their unique and close position to Jesus for their own gain.

And their ambition was not even phased by Jesus question, "**Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?**" In boundless self-confidence, they answered "**We are able.**"

But truly, they were not able. They, as much as all the other disciples, fled from Jesus in the garden as He was being arrested. They, as much as the other disciples, were hiding behind locked doors on Easter evening "**for fear of the Jews.**" John20:19

Jesus was speaking of His death when He spoke of His drinking the cup and this upcoming baptism. This baptism would not be one of water, but of blood. The cup He was to drink was the cup of suffering. Jesus, and no other, would suffer the fullness of God's wrath down to its bitter dregs. For their pride, for their self-promotion, for their power-lust, and selfishness, Jesus would thirst for refreshment to stifle the aftertaste of their sin and guilt. He would be baptized by His spilt blood on the cross.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Do we find ourselves so different from James... and John... and the other disciples? In your prayers, do you see a brazen pattern of praying primarily for yourself and your advantage, using your unique and close position to Jesus for your own personal gain, and then praying for others usually as an after thought? Do you sometimes consider that you are so strong – that your faith is so strong – that you would be able to drink the cup of suffering, even if all others should fall away? Do you find yourself looking down on others in society, wanting to judge & condemn them, wishing fire from heaven would consume them, or some other horrible tragedy befall them, and thus cut off their time of grace before even the Lord's long-patient suffering is over with them?

These are not the attitude that Jesus teaches us today. These are thoughts that would desire to lord it over others. In fact, they are thoughts and desires that would even attempt to lord it over Jesus Himself, thinking that you are more knowledgeable and wise than God who is ordering all things

according to His good and gracious will.

So instead of serving God and your neighbor, and being the “slave of all,”  
you would seek power and prestige and a name for yourself.

And how often has the opportunity become available for you to share your “strong” faith,  
only to find yourself shut up by your own fear, not of death, but of being ridiculed and mocked.  
You would think that after being united with Jesus through Baptism and Holy Communion  
and hearing Him speak to you for as long as you have, more of Him would have rubbed off on you.

But take heart! for Jesus has come and has given **His life as a ransom for many... for you!**

As He entered His glory, two thieves hung beside Him, one on His right and one on His left.

Not even then did they drink His cup of suffering, the complete absence of God’s love and mercy.

But one was baptized into Christ’s death as he sought the Lord’s forgiveness even in that final hour.

I wonder if James and John reflected back to their request of Jesus and thought about those thieves.

I wonder if they later shook their heads at their sinful, self-confidence

and their ignorance of what was to come for Jesus as He hung on the cross in all His glory.

If they did, I bet that they looked all the more lovingly at their patient and forgiving Savior,  
who gave up His life as a ransom for them and for all to whom they would preach.

Jesus was right though, that James would drink from the cup of suffering and  
would be baptized into a death like Jesus’.

St. James was the first of the 12 disciples to suffer the martyr’s death.

You heard the account read as today’s Lesson; how Herod Agrippa I put him to death by the sword.

We don’t hear anything else about James’ death... the circumstances that brought it about.

In fact, it is told almost in passing as the context to Peter’s miraculous Passover prison escape.

But do you think that James would be upset by this? That he wasn’t given more ink... or more time?

Not a chance!

He had the privilege to confess Jesus as Lord and Savior for as long as his time was appointed.

He was granted the allotment in life that had been prepared for him, and no one else.

He no longer needed to push for position or be self-promoting.

As a ransomed soul, he was free to serve and to become a slave of his Savior, and of all others,  
to promote Christ by preaching and administering Him through Word and Sacrament.

He was free to give up his reputation, wealth, and earthly life for his crucified and risen Savior  
because he had the promise that he too would rise from death and sit in glory with Jesus.

This is your freedom, too. Not to be vying for honor or placement among your peers or in the Church,  
but to be the Lord’s servant, receiving any form of service that He grants to you,  
no matter how lowly or prestigious the role might seem to be.

For it has been granted to and prepared for you and only you.

And if that role is to drink a cup of suffering for being a Christian, of being mocked for His name,  
or the loss of employment or pension because you will not burden your conscience to abide  
by an employer’s immoral mandates, or even to face death, do not fear.

For like James, you have been baptized into Christ’s death.

You have died to sin and are freed from the fear of death as an heir of eternal life.

What job or pension has the Lord provided already, that He can't provide again, should He choose?  
What mockery would you endure here that Christ will not reward in the glory of eternal paradise?

But if these seem difficult thoughts to think for you now,  
then come to the Lord's Supper and partake of His strength by which He gave up His life  
as a ransom for you.

If your conscience is burdened with sin, and you fear God's eternal separation from you,  
then come to the Holy Communion and partake of His crucified and risen body and blood,  
by which He has redeemed you and by which He unites you to Himself forever.

Fear not, for the Lord Jesus Christ still comes to serve you that you might reign with Him in glory.

In Jesus name. **Amen.**

*Soli Deo Gloria*