

The Festival of St. James the Elder, Apostle
25 July, Anno Domini 2021
St. Mark 10:35-45
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

There is certainly something laudable about the request of Sts. James and John. It was bold. The Sons of Thunder weren't afraid to ask Jesus for exactly what they desired. And is it really a bad thing to ask Jesus to be near Him in His glory? No. But James and John were seeking glory for themselves. They understood Jesus' glory as men do - power and self-promotion. That is why Jesus has to call all 12 to repentance and teach them what true glory is.

Now, we are to be bold in prayer. We are not to be like those who betray their unbelief by acting as though we are bothering God. In his Epistle, the other St. James writes "But let him (the one who lacks worldly wisdom) ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." (James 1:6-8) Trying to gain our Father's confidence by false humility and making it sound like we're trying to not overstep our bounds is unbelief. It despises God and His Word and doesn't take seriously the sacrifice our Lord made on the cross so that you might be restored to God and made His dearly beloved child. Using lots of words that are either saccharine sweet or require a degree in theology and a dictionary to define are insulting to God. He doesn't need you to try to puff up His ego or make Him think you're cute or convince Him that you're not asking for much or impress Him with your education.

Pray as boldly and confidently and simply as your 3-year-old who comes, pulls on your pant leg, and simply makes her desires known. Your heavenly Father loves you. Not because you're super special or sufficiently pious. You're neither of those things. He loves you because you are covered in the Blood of His beloved Son, Jesus. You are baptized. And He loves sinners like you precisely by forgiving your sins and inviting you to call upon Him. So pray. Be bold like James and John and let your requests be known to God. That kind of prayer is pleasing to God because it's based on His promises to you. Prayers of confidence say to God "I believe you. I believe that You will be faithful and do all that You have promised, even though I don't even deserve the smallest crumb of bread from Your hand. In Your Son Jesus Christ, You have shown with perfect clarity Your

great love for me and for all sinners.” Be bold. Pray. Pray for deliverance. Pray for the Holy Spirit. Pray for faith in Christ that moves mountains.

But pray in the right knowledge of Christ and His Father. Pray according to who God actually is, not who you imagine Him to be. What James and John asked for isn't at all what they thought they were asking for because they did not yet understand Jesus or His glory. What men glory in and find glorious is nothing like God's glory. Men equate glory with their own improvement and elevation over others. When we seek glory we seek exaltation, self-improvement, self-empowerment. When we seek glory we seek our own benefit. Men's glory is about what is shiny and big and loud. This is why God's glory is absolutely alien to us. Jesus said to the Pharisees “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” We cannot seek both. They are enemies of one another. If you are seeking to please people or make them like you or impress them, then you cannot be seeking the glory that comes from God. And all who seek the glory of men will perish eternally.

God's glory isn't found in His majesty or His power or even in His holiness. God's glory isn't in what He does for Himself. This is the glory of men. God's glory is hidden under the very things the world despises and finds inglorious. God's glory is found in what He does for His enemies who hate Him, who wish that He didn't exist, who rebel against Him and seek to overthrow Him. God's glory is in dying....for you! He suffers what you deserve for your seeking after your own glory and longing to be exalted in the eyes of others and to exercise power and authority over them. He dies to save you from the foolish and damning things your vanity leads you to do. He dies for your pride and your unbelief. This is His glory and His joy. The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many - for you. The crucified Jesus is the glory of God's people.

This is foolishness to the world and, frankly, to our own sinful flesh. Death is failure. Death is weakness. We run from death. “How can I be glorified if I die, if I am nothing, if no one notices me? I'm dead! I want to be strong. I want to be important. I want to be successful. I want people to think I'm cool. I want lots of likes and shares on social media and I'll do anything to get them. I want to be happy. I don't want to suffer. I don't want to give things up. I want to gain things. I don't want to bear other peoples' burdens. They should bear them themselves because they created the mess they're in.” Repent. You cannot serve both God and mammon. Either you will love the things of this world and sacrifice

the things of God to have them or you will love the righteousness, life, and forgiveness of God and sacrifice anything and everything to have them and count everything else as loss. You will either seek with the unbelievers to be served and have others sacrifice so that you can have what you want or with Christ, in Christ, you will serve and sacrifice everything on the altar of the good of your neighbor, even your life. There is no middle ground here. You may have only one god. Examine your life carefully - how you think, how you speak, how you act, how you dress, how you spend your time and money. They will tell you whose glory you are seeking, whose attention and approval you desire.

To pray that you might sit at Jesus' right hand in His glory is to ask to die with Jesus - to be hung on a cross, to suffer and die, to sacrifice yourself - your desires, your comfort, your benefit, perhaps even your blood - for the benefit of others. Of course, there is only one death that paid for sins and that redeems sinners from eternal judgment and it certainly isn't yours or mine. That glory belongs alone to the only-begotten Son of God, Mary's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Only His innocent suffering and death could satisfy the wrath of God against sin. That death you and I don't have to die. Indeed, no sinner has to suffer that death because Jesus already did. All who take hold of His death by faith enjoy it's benefits. And all who enjoy it's benefits are set free from the vain and selfish need to glorify themselves over others. Instead, they are free to offer up their own lives in service and sacrifice for the good of others, because their glory is in Christ who saved them from death.

This is what your baptism is all about because it is a baptism into Jesus' death. In Christ, you have drunk the bitter gall of God's wrath and been baptized with the baptism of God's judgment. In Christ, you have already died to sin. All your sins, even the ones that trouble you this very hour, have already been punished and atoned for. The sins of the whole world have been atoned for. None were forgotten. None were excluded because they were too heinous or disgusting. None. And for Jesus' sake you are righteous, you are clean. This is the glory of God - that He has saved sinners rather than condemned them, that He has offered up His own life in your place so that you might go free.

To be glorified with Jesus is to suffer with Jesus - to suffer the hatred of the world, to suffer the rejection of friends and loved ones who reject your Lord, to suffer the constant assaults and temptations of the devil, to suffer under the weakness of your own sinful flesh and be at constant war with its sinful desires. To suffer with Jesus, to speak of the Lord's testimonies before kings, as St. James found out being the first of the apostles to be martyred, sometimes means that we do have to suffer

even the destruction of our bodies at the hands of those who hate the pure doctrine we confess and preach. The world will always have plenty of Herod Agrippa's who will murder God's children to satisfy God's enemies. But this isn't to be avoided or feared. Rather, it is our joy to be counted worthy to suffer for the Name of Jesus. To be glorified with Jesus is forsake all of your own glory, to not worry about how you appear to the world; more than that, to deliberately not want to appear as the world, really, to know that what the world wants and does is evil. It is to not cover yourself in pride and vanity and, in many ways, to embrace all that the world finds weak and foolish. It is to die to the sinful world and sinful death and to know that your life is safely hidden with God in Christ. It is to subject yourself to the needs and the good of others and to seek no gain or benefit for yourself because every need that you have is already met in Christ.

The Christian is not surprised by suffering because suffering at the hands of the devil, the world, and your flesh is the way of Christ. These hate Christ and they hate His teaching. Therefore they will hate and seek the silence and destruction of all who bear His Name and speak His Word. But to their great chagrin, blessed are you when you bear this suffering, when you are counted worthy to suffer for the Name of Christ. For Christian suffering, borne in faith, has eternal life as its end. The world may think it has put you to shame, shown you to be a fool. Like Herod believed of James, he thought he had gained the upper hand and dealt a mortal blow to James and Christ's Church. He did no such thing. And on the Last Day when Christ returns in His majesty, James' faith, the faith you confess, will be vindicated and all who hated Christ and His Church will be silenced and put to eternal shame. Even as our head Jesus' passed through suffering before entering into the eternal glory of heaven, so too must we His body if we would follow Him. There is no other road. Such suffering can only be avoided by forsaking Christ and joining with the enemies of God. That is certainly the easier and happier path in the moment. That is how you receive the praise and glory of men. But the praise and glory of men is nothing - it is contrary to the true praise and glory that come from God.

You, dear Christian, know the festal shout, the loud cries of "Hosanna" that we sing as our true Lord and King comes to us in the hidden glory and majesty of the Holy Supper to give you a share in His glory, to give you a conscience purified by His Blood and the certain hope of eternal life. Know for certain that in Christ, your suffering is not in vain because, as St. Paul writes in Romans chapter 5 "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." And be

sure of this, God will work even your darkest hour of suffering to your good. Again, St. Paul writes that those whom the Lord has predestined for salvation He conforms to the cruciform image of His Son. And the same Lord has granted you the Holy Spirit to comfort you and to grant you strength to persevere. None can stand against God's elect because He alone is God. None less than Christ Jesus who died and now lives is interceding before the throne of God for you and all that He asks His Father gives.

Let us then, with St. James and all the faithful boldly and confidently pray that we may share in Christ's true glory - the glory of His cross. Let us proclaim the mighty and saving works of God before the world and gladly suffer all, even death, rather than fall away. Let us cast aside all desire for the glory of this world and seek only after the glory which comes from God. And may the Lord grant to us that we may confidently call upon Him in our hour of suffering and every need and rest assured that He will grant us nothing less than His Holy Spirit who will guide us into all truth and help us patiently endure. For all who persevere in Christ will see their hope fulfilled and will stand with the martyrs and all the saints around the throne of God where all tears and all suffering will be removed and we will marvel in the glory of our Savior for all eternity.

In the Name of +Jesus.