**St. James, Apostle and Martyr**

**John 14:1-7**

***The Example of St. James***

St. James addresses his Epistle, “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” He is not addressing it only to those only of Jewish background, but to all the faithful, those who by faith are counted as Abraham’s offspring, or, as we would call them simply, “Christians.” But James is not speaking to Christians in one place as Paul does with Ephesians or Thessalonians. James is speaking to those “scattered abroad.” St. Luke tells us why they are scattered all over the Mediterranean world. After Stephen was martyred, Saul increased his persecution against the Christian “church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 8:1-4). Displaced Christians feared they were soon to follow in Stephen’s bloody path and thew needed instruction and encouragement. From her infancy the Church has known what It is to be targeted and hated for standing firm in the plain words of the Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, and Jesus Himself in Holy Scripture. A it was in the beginning, is now, and will be until the end of this world.

James faithfully instructed his scattered flock in the Word of God until old age. As tradition records, at the age of 94 James was taken to the highest Wall of the Temple by the Pharisees. He was told to disavow Jesus or else he would be pushed off the wall. Refusing to do so, he was pushed and fell. The fall did not kill him, and the bloodthirsty crowd gathered to watch the spectacle stoned him after he hit the ground. Even this did not cause his death, so one bystander with a tool used to beat rugs bludgeoned James until his skull was shattered. It’s a gory and revolting picture to have in your mind, but martyrdom has never been a clean or quick business. Whether all the details of this tradition are factual is beside the point. The point is that, regardless of how he died, James met his death with a spirit willing to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from Christ. By the comfort and aid of the Holy Spirit James endured his martyr’s death with Jesus’ words in his ears: ““Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

James is laid before us on the Church’s calendar of saints’ Feast days as an example. He closed his eyes and accepted his death craving not this life and its temporary pleasures, but the unfailing joys of feasting at the marriage fest of the Lamb in His Kingdom, which has no end.

It’s easy, though, to follow in the footsteps of Elijah in our Old Testament. Afraid of Jezebel and her desire for revenge, Elijah hides. Even though he witnessed with his own eyes the power of God to do great and awesome things, Elijah is afraid. He hides himself. We, too, like to hide ourselves when it seems a confession of the doctrines of God could mean trouble. Elijah and James were faced with death. We typically aren’t. What stops us is usually fear that Thanksgiving might be awkward, or we might have some nasty comments on Facebook or be whispered about by the cool kids. Too often we let Very minor things silence us. We think the comfort of silence now and the tinge of guilt later is better than the perceived fallout of saying something. But chances are none of us will face the fallout of being pushed off a wall, being stoned, and then clubbed.

Even though we are sinfully silent, Jesus was not. In your place He made the confession of the true faith even as He bore His own cross up Golgotha, endured mockery, and accepted death on the cross. Never once did He recant or remain silent. Counting His obedience and confession as yours, you are absolved. He wrote your name in the Book of Life when His Word planted the seed of faith in your heart, and now He confesses you before the Father as His own child.

Because Jesus wears your flesh and walked through the trials and temptations of this life He knows how tempting it is to remain silent like Elijah in the cave instead of confessing him like James. That is why He will take up residence in your body and blood with his own, to give you strength for this life, strength to say what needs to be said.

While we pray none of us will have to meet the same end as St. James, it is increasingly apparent that we will have to live a life similar to his as hostility to the Word of God and what it says increases. So we ask God today to give us the same graces He gave St. James to remain steadfast and make the good confession and to do it all trusting in the promise of Jesus: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”