



OUR GREAT ST. JAMES



The St. James Worship Ministry of the Pastoral Council invited each of the council's ministries to contribute, in some way, to the celebration of our St. James feast day. The Faith Formation Ministry's contribution is the following narrative on the life and legends of our patron, St. James the Greater.

INTRODUCTION

The patron saint of St. James Parish is formally known as St. James the Greater. He is called the Greater to distinguish him from another apostle, also named James, who is called the Lesser. Relatively little is known for sure about either of the two St. James, but there are some generally undisputed facts about our patron:



- he was one of the sons of Zebedee, along with another apostle, John
- he was the third apostle after Peter and Andrew to be chosen by Jesus
- there are several mentions of him in the gospels so he must have been a favorite of Jesus, or at least the evangelists
- he was put to death by Herod Agrippa in 44 AD
- he is generally held to be the first of the apostles to be martyred



While these are the few known facts about him and his life there are many stories and legends, but most of them were not documented until at least the Middle Ages. Regardless, he is considered one of the greatest of saints.. Of churches in the United States named after a saint, James is the 5th most popular with 1270. St. James feast day is celebrated on July 25.

Of course there is no surviving likeness of St. James but many of the world's great master painters had a shot at his portrait. The bearded one here is by Albrecht Durer, and the other is by El Greco.

St. James has been adopted as the patron saint of Spain, equestrians, blacksmiths, tanners and veterinarians.

SOME GOSPEL DETAILS

Our great St. James was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and brother of John. He is called James the Greater to distinguish him from James, son of Alphaeus, who is known as James the Lesser who was probably shorter of stature. The Gospels record a number of facts about James:

- they were with their father by the seashore when Jesus called them to follow him
- much later James was one of only three apostles whom Jesus selected to bear witness to his Transfiguration, and the agony in the garden
- James and his brother wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan town, but were rebuked by Jesus
- The Acts of the Apostles records that Herod had James executed by sword
- he is the only apostle whose martyrdom is recorded in the New Testament and is believed to be the first of the apostles martyred for his faith

We know nothing of St. James's early life except that he was the brother of John, and probably the elder of the two since his name is always mentioned before John. It is worth noting that James is never mentioned in the Gospel of St. John, who has a humble reserve not only with regard to himself, but also to his brother. Some say his mother, Salome, was a sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and if this were so James and John were first cousins of the Lord.

James and John had that particular character indicated by the name "Boanerges," sons of thunder, given to them by the Lord; they were burning and impetuous in their evangelical zeal and severe in temper.

The zealous temper of James and his leading part in the Jewish Christian communities probably led Agrippa to choose him as the first victim of his persecution. According to one tradition the actual accuser who brought James to judgment before Herod was so moved by his confession that he became a Christian himself, and they were beheaded together.

Emblems of St James

James' emblem was the scallop shell (or "cockle shell"), and pilgrims to his shrine often wore that symbol on their hats or clothes, for scallops were found in the Bay of Biscay that is not far from parts of the pilgrimage route. At one time possessing a scallop was sufficient proof that one had completed the pilgrimage. The French word for a scallop is *coquille St. Jacques*.



Another emblem of the pilgrimage is the gourd which the early pilgrims used as a water bottle.

And yet another emblem is the elaborate red cross of St. James with the blade of a sword forming the lower part, reflecting his role in the eventual eviction of the Moors from Spain.



SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA & THE WAY OF ST. JAMES

Many of the legends relating to St. James are concerned with his travel to Spain and his activities there. It is thus not surprising that he is the Patron Saint of Spain, and many Christians throughout the ages believed his body was buried in the town of Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia in northwest Spain.



The greatest of the legends states that in 813 AD a hermit was led by a vision to a spot where a body was found buried in a field. The body was quite fresh, remained so, caused miracles to take place, was presumed to be St. James, and this fact was soon authenticated by the local bishop. Of course how the saint's body ended up in Spain is shrouded in mystery, but the story got around, more miracles were reported, the faithful began to flock to the site, and have done so ever since. A church was built, a town grew up around it and eventually a great cathedral was built to house the Saint's relics.

The pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela became the most important Christian pilgrimage outside of those to the Holy Land. The traditional pilgrimage is known as El Camino de Santiago (in English: The Way of St. James), and it has always been a walking pilgrimage. In fact pilgrims have walked there from many sites all over Europe since the ninth century, so there are many different routes. The most travelled route is known as the Camino Frances; it starts at the border between France and Spain in the western Pyrenees, and winds its way for approximately five hundred miles across northern Spain.

The Camino Frances has been such a popular pilgrimage that it has been designated a World Heritage Site.



The Name James

The English name "James" actually comes from the Italian "Giacomo", a variant of "Giacobo" which is derived from *Iacobus* (Jacob) in Latin, itself from the Greek *Ἰάκωβος* (Jacobos), all originally from Hebrew *יַעֲקֹב* (Ya'acov).

In French, Jacob is translated "Jacques".

In eastern Spain, *Iacobus* became "Jacome" or "Jaime"; in western Iberia it became "Iago", which when prefixed with "Sant" became "Santiago"; in Portugal and Galicia, "Tiago" is also spelled "Diego".

Legends

Some claim that St. James preached the gospel in Iberia as well as in the Holy Land. After his martyrdom in Jerusalem, his disciples carried his body by sea back to Spain, where they landed on the coast of Galicia, and took it inland for burial at Santiago de Compostela.

Others claim he never went to Iberia, but the translation of his relics from Judea to Galicia was effected by a series of miraculous happenings: after his death in Jerusalem his body was taken up by angels, and sailed in a rudderless, unattended boat to Iberia.

Despite controversies then and now the authenticity of the relics of St. James at Santiago de Compostela was asserted by Pope Leo XIII in 1884.



Another legend says that in 40 AD the Virgin Mary appeared to James upon a pillar on the bank of the Ebro River in north eastern Spain while he was preaching. That pillar is conserved and venerated within the present Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar, in Zaragoza, Spain.

An even later tradition states that he miraculously appeared before the Spanish troops during the battle of Clavijo in 841 AD and helped turn what was about to be a loss into a decisive victory against the Moors, and was henceforth called *Matamoros* (Moor-slayer). *Santiago y cierra España* ("St James and strike for Spain") has been the traditional battle cry of Spanish armies. There are many portraits of St. James showing him in armor, reflecting this legend.

Spain is not alone in claiming the relics of St. James. According to another tradition, relics of the Apostle are kept in the church of St. Saturnin at Toulouse in France, but it is not improbable that such sacred relics should have been divided between two churches.



Pope Benedict XVI on St. James

Our pope, Benedict XVI, in June 2006 said this of St. James: we can learn much from St. James: promptness in accepting the Lord's call even when he asks us to leave the "boat" of our human securities, enthusiasm in following him on the paths that he indicates to us over and above any deceptive presumption of our own, readiness to witness to him with courage, if necessary to the point of making the supreme sacrifice of life.

Thus James the Greater stands before us as an eloquent example of generous adherence to Christ. He, who initially had requested, through his mother, to be seated with his brother next to the Master in his Kingdom, was precisely the first to drink the chalice of the passion and to share martyrdom with the Apostles.