

LOCKDOWN DAY 119 – 23 JULY 2020

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese

Scripture: Mark 10:35-45

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness

Yesterday, we honoured the role of Mary Magdalene mid the grieving and trauma standing at the foot of the cross and at the empty tomb. She was the first one commissioned by Jesus to tell the truth of the resurrection. In False Bay Diocese we actively stand against any form of discrimination or oppression. We are sensitive to not gloss over the presence of women in ministry and not to consign the women in our churches and communities to invisibility.

Today, we will be looking at the life and teaching of the Apostle and Martyr James, who is commemorated in the church's calendar on Saturday, 25 July.

James, the older brother of John, is often known as James the Great to distinguish him from the other apostle of the same name commemorated in the calendar with St Philip on 3 May. James and John were sons of Zebedee and Salome. James was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus and traditionally considered the first apostle to be martyred. In Acts 12:1-3, we read that James was put to the sword by King Herod Agrippa in the year 43 or 44. From this we can conclude that James was very active in Jerusalem as a messenger of Christ. An ancient tradition believes that the man who denounced St James to King Agrippa was converted by the apostle's commitment and fearlessness in the face of suffering, and himself suffered martyrdom together with him.

By profession, James and John were fishermen. As they were repairing their nets one day, Jesus passed by. The Lord **called** them away from the humble work of mending their nets and appointed them fishers of people. They promptly left their father and their nets and faithfully followed him. Together with Peter, James and John made up the core group of the three Apostles. We ask ourselves, are our churches *'fishers of people or keepers of aquariums?'*

Being, like his brother, a "son of thunder" James had zealously contested the Samaritans who did not welcome Jesus and wanted to call down fire on them. This won him a reproof from the Lord (Lk 9:51-56). Together with his brother John, he also made the ambitious request for one of the first places in the Kingdom, provoking a reaction from the other Apostles. Jesus assured them a primacy of another kind: *"The cup that I drink, you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised."* Alluding to their martyrdom and meaning that they would participate in his suffering and death. This indeed they did. Jesus asked them to aim at the primacy of service: *"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be the first among you must be slave of all."* The Lord did not deny them important places with him in his glory, but only asked them not to aim for power and position (Mark 10:35-46).

In the Scriptures "**cup**" is frequently used as a metaphor for suffering. That meaning is clear in the Gethsemane scene where Jesus begs to God to let the **cup** pass him by if possible. Likewise, baptism here signifies being plunged into suffering and going through the throes of death, to emerge to new life. See these powerful words in the Introduction to the liturgy of our Service of Baptism (An APB, pg 380).

Jesus uses the opportunity to tell his followers, including ourselves, about relationships and in particular those in ministry leadership positions to not get above themselves. We have been elected or appointed into positions of authority and we **are to** exercise it for good. We are to travel with Jesus, to endure hardships, work at understanding our mission. The 'old normal' is gone. We must use well the 'new normal' that is beckoning. Christian leadership must set the example of humble service and not lord it over other members of the church. We must adopt Jesus' pattern of leadership and relationships. The only "**throne**" that Jesus shares with his disciples is the "**throne of grace**". Here one receives not places of honour alongside Jesus but mercy, grace and timely help. (Heb 4:16)

James was a first-hand witness of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31), of the raising of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:37-43), of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mk 9:2-8) and of the Lord's agony in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). It is believed, but not confirmed, that James preached the gospel in Spain. The city of Santiago in Chile is so named in honour of St James (San Tiago).

In the New Testament we have a wonderful letter of St James, addressed to *"all God's people scattered over the whole world."* Some experts believe that it was written by St James the Greater, our Saint of the day. In it he offers practical wisdom and guidance for Christian attitudes and behaviour. He teaches, *"What God the Father considers to be pure and genuine religion is this: to take care of orphans and widows in their suffering and to keep oneself from being corrupted by the world."* (James 1:27).

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, it is Apostle James who gave us a clear instruction about the sacrament of the *Anointing of the Sick*. This is what he says, *"Is anyone among you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? He should sing praises. Is there anyone who is ill? He should send for the church elders, who will pray for him and rub oil on him in the name of the Lord. This prayer made in faith will heal the sick person, the Lord will restore him to health, and the sins he has committed will be forgiven"* (James 5:13-15). This is a very comforting, encouraging and hope-giving instruction. (Refer to *An APB, pg 502 ff*).

In this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, we cannot explain why some people are getting well physically whereas others are passing away. Our only adequate response in the face of this suffering is to turn toward the Merciful One, in whom we place all our trust. This is not an explanation for how a merciful God can allow innocent persons to suffer, but it is the response of faith. The wellspring for this mercy is that Jesus has himself endured all that we endure and is thus able to suffer with all those who suffer. As we immerse ourselves in God's mercy, we are baptized in a love that is stronger than suffering and death. We circle in healing prayer those known and unknown to us.

Let us again read the Letter of St James, savour his teaching, learn from him the lessons of Christian living, and follow his example of love and commitment to Christ our Lord.

We celebrate, pray for and **reach out** to members of our churches belonging to St James the Great. We also reach out to any widow or widower.

I offer you a **prayer** written by Richard Rohr:

*O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our world, especially from the Covid 19 and Gender Based Violence pandemics. Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, **Amen***

I am, Because we Are, Because God is ... Opening hearts to heal God's world. *Goodbye and God be with you 'til we meet again on Monday.*