

Camino Chaplaincy for the Feast of St James

Hello, and welcome to St James' Day. Prior to my return to the UK 4.5 years ago I was Chaplain to the church of St James in Porto. Now I am the Lead Chaplain to the Camino Chaplaincy, which means that apart from taking my turn in ministry in Santiago, I also liaise with the other Chaplains and deal with administration links with the Diocese in Europe, and with our Santiago-based friend and colleague Sybille Yates. I had planned to be in Santiago now, to take my turn as duty Chaplain, as the church, and the great Cathedral, celebrates the feast of St James - but of course that plan was kicked into touch by the virus which has disrupted all our lives. There is no Camino at the moment, just a few mainly Spanish pilgrims, the albergues are either closed or trying to work out how to re-open and the Church in Spain is only gradually opening up, and we are all praying that the virus will **not** return, but that the Camino **will**.

Because getting to Santiago and its cathedral was not possible, I called to a little Saxon Church at Llangua close to where I live which is dedicated to St James.



It is in Wales, but also within the Diocese of Hereford, and about 20 minutes drive away from where I now live. The River Monnow skirts the edge of the churchyard and if I was to wade across, just 6 or 7 steps would bring me to the opposite bank, and to England, where a different set of Covid 19 restrictions are in place.... what strange times we are going through.

I should perhaps explain that Llangua loosely translates as "the place of Cua", and the original dedication is likely to have been to St.Cua, a Saxon saint of the 5th century in Cornwall, and of whom very little is known. She was regarded as an especially virtuous woman and called a saint when she died, her feast is February 8th. Quite why she was venerated here is not known, nor is it known when the church was rededicated, but I am grateful for the chance to remember James at his church here.

For a number of reasons, we cannot enter the church, which is a shame because it has a charming interior, and includes an excellent carved statue of

James in full pilgrim dress, but we have a photograph to accompany our gospel reading for today

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew. 20. 20-28

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favour of him. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."

When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said,

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

This is the gospel of the Lord.



Sermon

Today, 25th July, then is the feast of St James. It is good to celebrate our saint's for it enables us to explore a bit about who we are through the lens of their lives. All the saints, including the great apostles like James, were like us, disciples of Jesus Christ, so we celebrate them recalling how they lived out their own discipleship, as a guide and inspiration for us today. So, what does Saint James tell us about who we are, and who are to be?

If we are honest when we take a first look at St James the Apostle in the Gospels we discover that he does not immediately come across as a disciple who covers himself with glory! When we think of saints, we probably think immediately about perfect, noble, pious, even sweet persons. But this is only a partial picture. The saints are also real people, like you and I. They are filled with defects as well as heroic characteristics. And James is no exception.

Although he was from a humble background – remember, he was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee –

- nevertheless today's Gospel is this rather embarrassing story when James and his brother John and his mother are all getting a bit argumentative

with Jesus about matters of power and status and influence! We also know from the Gospels that James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee, were known by the nickname Sons of Thunder, so we can deduce that they had rather explosive tempers!

On the other hand James, together with his brother John and their fellow fisherman Peter, became among the inner circle of Jesus's friends. James, Peter and John are the ones who are present with Jesus at key moments – on the mount of the Transfiguration, and in the Garden of Gethsemane. These were by implication among the key leaders of the earliest Christian community. And we know from the reading from Acts today that James was singled out by Herod Agrippa to be the first martyr among the twelve apostles. His death took place fairly early, perhaps around 42 AD, back on home ground after missionary work in Spain. Thus James indeed came to occupy one of those places of honour in the Kingdom of God, which he and his brother had argued about and hoped for – for he indeed drank the cup of Christ's suffering and death. After his death his disciples supposedly took his remains back to Spain, and so the legends began.

St James is clearly a contradictory figure and a flawed individual: hot tempered and impetuous, a bit scheming perhaps, getting his mother to intercede with Jesus to get him a privileged position. Yet so firm in his commitment to our Lord that when his faith was put to the test he came to be the first Apostle to be martyred.

How fitting it is then to have James as our saint for today. For we are today a community of disciples who are far from being perfect. We come together to



pray, to worship, to try to strengthen our Christian life, supporting each other along the way, like pilgrims on the *Camino*, accompanying each other and helping each other when we meet obstacles and hardships. James and the ancient *caminho* de Santiago reminds us that our spiritual journey to Christ as disciples, is just like the journey of pilgrims, walking together, ready to help each other when we meet challenges, and when our faith is tested.

But the best bit of having James as our patron is this: Because of this rather impetuous, flawed and even ambitious saint, Christ was given the occasion to teach us, about what it really means to follow him: “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave.” This is among the greatest of lessons that Jesus taught. He reinforced it dramatically at the Last Supper when he washed the feet of his disciples. It is a lesson James no doubt learned in the years leading up to his martyrdom.

The the lesson which Christ taught his friend James is that discipleship is about service, not status, power and influence. Jesus said – that is the way of the world, the gentiles have their great ones and even tyrants, and lord their power over others. It will not be so among you. Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant. In the Kingdom of God there is no climbing a ladder to seek position, privilege and power. Jesus says that to get ahead in the kingdom we are to be humble servants. What a contrast.

So, let us renew our identity as James like people. We know that we are not perfect human beings. We are simple, humble, flawed people journeying together as disciples, helping each other as pilgrims through life, picking one another up when we fall, bearing each other’s burdens. And because we recognise we are not perfect, we can welcome absolutely everyone else to be part of us, for the community of Jesus is not a puritan club, filled with by-laws and restrictions. The community of Jesus is an open one, where everyone, no matter how weak, how flawed, how sinful - **everyone** is welcomed in with the love of a Father who welcomes home his prodigal children. Amen

Let us move to Santa Susana to pray

Merciful God, whose holy apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, was obedient to the calling of your Son Jesus Christ and followed him even to death: help us, forsaking the false attractions of the world, to be ready at all times to answer your call without delay; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen



At this time of continued uncertainty, we pray for so much, but in particular for our Camino Chaplains as they offer their thoughts and deliberations here over the weeks to come. We pray for Sybille and all those in Spain as the Covid 19 restrictions, there are eased, and for the church in Spain, and those whose livelihood depends on the Camino. We pray for those who are working to look after all those who cannot look after themselves and who feel that they are alone.

Please allow us to pray for - You, your family, your congregation, your exploration of new ways of ministry in difficult times - the things on your heart this day. May the Christ who defies the rules of social distancing walk closely with you, now and always.

Blessing

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life and the blessing of Almighty God Father Son and Holy Spirit Be with you as you continue your Camino - and for all time



" Fishers of Men" - Shirloma

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