

Today, the 23rd of October, has been set aside to remember St. James. We remember him (and all the other saints) first and foremost of examples: men and women who received God's grace and help; saints who, redeemed by Christ, glorified Him in word and deed. We remember them to see how God deals with His people, that we might see how He deals with us also. Today we consider James—Jesus' brother. Let us then see how Christ redeemed James, and how James calls us to live as fellow brothers and sisters of Jesus.

What would it be like to have Jesus as your brother? Think about it. Picture yourself, and your siblings; throw Jesus into the mix. Now be honest: do you really want a brother that GOOD? How are you going to compare to Him? Your room is not as clean, your grades are not as good, your behavior is not even close. Imagine the family discussions, looking back to how you grew up with Jesus as your brother. Do you want the comparisons: Why can't you be more like your brother, more like Jesus?

James could tell us the answer. We hear of him in the Gospel reading, identified as the brother of Jesus. Whether brother or cousin (the Greek word can mean either one), James was close to Jesus, part of Jesus' family. He had Jesus for a brother—and it didn't really work out that well for James. Not at first. Today's reading talks about Jesus and James. Jesus is in His hometown, and no one will listen to Him. How'd this Jesus get so uppity? He's James' brother! James is normal, one of us; who does his brother think He is? Put yourselves in James' shoes: what have they just said of James? Compared to Jesus, he's a nobody. It's a backhanded compliment to James: Jesus, can't you be normal like your brother, like plain old James?

Scripture implies that James did not believe in Jesus; most likely, James is one of those

brothers who, on a different occasion, tried to get Jesus to shut up. They thought he was crazy. James resisted and ignored Jesus. In all likelihood, this came from a petty, vindictive, insecure pride. Maybe you see this pride in yourself. Pride that wants no one to be better than you. Pride that tries to drag down anyone who is better than you. Pride that may lead you to any number of mean-spirited words or deeds to get back at those who might be thought better than you—whether they are your siblings or not. Pride that keeps you from rejoicing in the good others do, because you are consumed with yourself, and how you stack up against them.

Such pride is looking for life in the wrong places. Such pride defines our life by insisting that we **MUST** be better than everyone. Sounds good—everyone wants to be the best. But this is no life. Not true life. It is part of an empty way of life. If you set out to prove you're better than everyone, you will drive everyone away from you. Pride is a way of life that leaves us isolated, as we drag down anyone who might be better than we are—slandering them, taking shots at them, pointing out their faults to say: He's no better than me. Isolated too, as we push further down anyone beneath us, just to prove again that we are better than they.

Worst of all, pride separates us from Jesus. If we are the best; if we must prove we are the best, what room is left for Jesus? If we're wrapped up in what we do and accomplish, what room is there to confess the truth of our sinfulness and receive Jesus' gift of life? Pride crowds Him right out of our lives. Watch out against pride! When it isolates us from others, we are the poorer for it. When it isolates us from Jesus, we have lost everything. After all, Jesus asks, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?

That's where James was: isolated from Jesus. At some point, it changed. Most likely, it changed after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared personally to James. That would change

things. Here's your brother, dead and buried three days ago, dropping by to pay you a visit. Here is Jesus, THE LIFE, the one who conquers death, appearing to James to give him LIFE. True life. Life that comes from forgiveness, life as Jesus' brother. Not just an earthly brother; this is a much closer bond: faith. The bond of faith binds us to Jesus so tightly that not even death can separate us. For faith is a bond that joins us to Jesus' life. A bond that lives and breathes by the very Word of God. For faith comes from hearing the message; faith lives by hearing God's Word. Stop hearing the Word, and faith will begin to shrink and die. Eventually, when faith is not fed by God's Word, it disappears; then the bond to Jesus is severed, and we are left alone in isolation and death.

Joined to Jesus by faith, James lives the life. The true life of fulfillment; a life of love for God and love for others. James lives this life as he prays continually. Day and night, tradition holds, James prayed in the temple. He prayed for his people, that the Lord might grant them forgiveness. He spent so much time kneeling in prayer that his knees grew knobby, like a camel's. That shows where James' priorities lie. Not in his looks, but in the Lord; not in his own well-being, but in the good of his people, the nation of Israel. Here is a life lived for others!

Living for others, James is made the head of the church in Jerusalem. We meet him there in Acts, proclaiming God's Word, ordering things according to that Word in Jerusalem and beyond. In our first reading we saw James there, with the apostles next to him, as the church gathered to consider the question of the Gentiles. It is James who passes the final verdict: they need not follow Jewish laws, but they ought to respect those Jewish Christians who do. Think of the impact James made as pastor of the church in Jerusalem; how through James the Word of God came to so many people, how through James' efforts the Lord led many to salvation in Jesus

Christ. Life lived in Jesus will do that. Other lives cannot claim any accomplishment even close to this. That's why a life lived for others finds the fulfillment and contentment lost when we live only for ourselves!

James writes the book of the New Testament that bears his name, a book that calls us to live faithfully and truly, loving our neighbor in word, in thought, and in deed. A life that lives out the faith God has given to us; a life that walks in God's commands. This is true life. For this life draws us closer to others through love; this life walks with the Lord, bound to Him and His forgiveness.

This life stands, even when death claims our bodies. James knows that firsthand. Tradition holds that James was put to death for preaching Jesus. The Jews, fearful that he would be too persuasive and lead people away from them and to Jesus, killed James. They threw him from the pinnacle of the temple, and then stoned James to death. James was faithful to the end, praying for the forgiveness of those who killed him. James then received the crown of life; living eternally with Jesus, his brother and Savior. That crown is worth more than anything in this world. For what happened to those who killed James? Those whose pride prevented them from believing in Jesus? They rejected God's Word and those who preached it. Their punishment came. The Romans put Jerusalem under siege and wiped them out. They died, wrapped up in themselves and their glory. James lives. You tell me: who lived the better life?

Think of your life, in light of James. What are you looking for in life? What do you hope to be and do? Jesus, His life, walking with Him, need to be at the top of the list. A life missing these is only an empty shell of a life. Put Jesus first; then attend to all the other callings the Lord has given you: to family, to work, to school, to recreation; live out these callings to

show love to your neighbor. This is true and lasting life; everything else will disappoint in the end. What good will it do you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?

Live for Jesus, for Jesus has come to you. In Baptism He has claimed you as His brother or sister. There in the water He declared: you are mine; I am your Savior. My Father is now your Father. You are part of my family, my very brother and sister: for you share the same flesh and blood that I have, you share my righteousness and forgiveness; you call upon my Father as your own Father. There at the font Jesus gave you life. His life. True life. Life redeemed from sin and death. Life in His family.

Live that life, even as James did. He received the same gift of eternal life that you have. Like James, be fervent in prayer, constantly seeking the Lord's blessings for others; asking for His help in your life. Listen to James, and be true in word and deed to the Lord who has redeemed you, loving your neighbor in sincerity and truth. Like James, be faithful to Jesus, even to the point of death (and all the lesser points that come up, and tempt you to put other things before Jesus), and you will receive the crown of life. Live this life! Live it, for when death comes for you, what will matter then?

What matters then is what matters now: Jesus and His life. Jesus has made you part of His family for life, that you might dwell with Him and all the saints eternally. Part of the family, you know what it means to have Jesus as your brother. It means life: true, eternal, never-ending life. Amen.