

Readings for Today: (Acts 11: 27 – 12:2); 2 Corinthians 4: 7 – 15; Psalm 125; Matthew: 20 – 28.

The Apostle whom we celebrate today is called 'The Great' to distinguish him from James The Less, who is celebrated in May with Saint Philip.

James and his brother John were fishermen. According to Mark, Matthew and Luke they were among the first disciples called by Jesus. Mark tells us (3:17) that Jesus gave the brothers the name *Boanerges*, that is *Sons of Thunder*, with which we may, perhaps, associate their suggestion that they should *call down fire* on Samaritans who *would not receive Jesus* (Lk 9:54). James is one whom the synoptic gospels show as a leader among the Twelve. He, with John and Simon Peter, were an inner group of three who accompanied Jesus at the healing of the daughter of Jairus (Mk 5:37; Lk 8:51), at the Transfiguration (Mk 9; Mt 17; Lk 9) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14; Mt 26). Together with Andrew, these three asked Jesus when the signs of the end of the Age would occur (Mk 13:3).

As is recorded in today's Gospel Reading (and the parallel account in Mark), James and John sought places of honour on either side of Jesus in his kingdom, provoking the hostility of the other ten. This provided the occasion for Jesus to teach about the nature of greatness in the kingdom. James was the first of the apostles to suffer martyrdom, being beheaded by order of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1 & 2) in AD 43 or 44. References in rabbinic writings suggest that this means of execution was prescribed for apostates – and so regarded by Herod as appropriate for the followers of Jesus. Nothing more is known for certain of James.

The Armenians claim that James's head is buried in their cathedral of S. James in Jerusalem. The Legend of the composition of the Apostles Creed ascribes to James the clause (*I believe in Jesus Christ) who was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born from the Virgin Mary.*

From the ninth century onwards suggestions appeared, recording both the preaching of James in Spain between the Resurrection and AD 40, and the miraculous transport of his body to Compostela in northern Spain, where his shrine is now the object of a major pilgrimage. Scholars and Church leaders have differed in their judgements on the authenticity of these relics, but, whatever the truth of this may be, Saint James is the principal patron saint of Spain.