Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 24, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“You do not know what you are asking” (Matt 20:21).

2 Cor 4:7-15; Matt 20:20-28

Feast of Saint James, Apostle

Today the church commemorates the Apostle James, brother of the Apostle John, together known as the sons of Zebedee and nicknamed the “Sons of Thunder” for their outburst against a Samaritan town that did not welcome Jesus. These two fishermen brothers played a key role with St. Peter in the Gospels as special witnesses and confidants to Jesus. He takes them with him when he is transfigured, when he enters the house of Jairus to raise his daughter and, most telling, when he prays in the garden of Gethsemane.

They almost seem to have succeeded at securing the request they recruited their own mother to approach Jesus about, that they would be his chief lieutenants, sitting on his right and left when he came to power. In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus uses the occasion to instruct all of his disciples that a path of suffering lay ahead for them in Jerusalem.

The brothers' ploy to get an edge on the other disciples becomes a critical teaching moment for Jesus, who tries to break through their ambition by showing them that the actual competition was for the lowest place, not the highest. If they insist on being the greatest, let them excel at humble service. Jesus himself is about to enter the paradox of his own diminishment, a rapid downward path to rejection and a shameful death. The chalice they are fighting over is the cup of his blood they will later celebrate at every Eucharist.

Jesus’ lesson concludes with a vision that has haunted church leadership down through the ages. Power corrupts, creates false privilege and vanity, and those in the world who seek it use it to lord it over others, making their authority felt. In the church, the very word “hierarchy” has become synonymous with a heightened sense of superiority and the need for special trappings of office, garments and protocols that command automatic respect. Jesus anticipated the scandal of this kind of power and pressed his disciples to imitate him in total service.

All the Apostles were works in progress. James and John needed anger management and a dose of humility to become saints. They encourage us not to be discouraged at our own failings. St. Paul rejoiced that the treasure of Christ could be held in earthen vessels. Let God, the divine Potter, shape our lives for service, and we, too, will know the joy of the Gospel.

Advertisement