

Dear Friend

Today is the feast of St Philip and St James, traditionally observed on 1 May. They were two of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, part of his inner circle.

Philip is traditionally described as the apostle who preached in Greece, Syria and Phrygia. It seems likely that with his Greek name, he spoke Greek and he was known to the Greek people amongst the crowds.

The Gospel of John recounts Philip's calling as a disciple of Jesus. Philip is described as from the city of Bethsaida, and the evangelist connects him with Andrew and Peter, who were from the same town. He also was among those surrounding John the Baptist when the latter first pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God. It was Philip who first introduced Nathanael (sometimes identified as Bartholomew) to Jesus. Philip may have been one among those attending the wedding at Cana.

There are several other references to him in the New Testament, but importantly, during the Last Supper, when Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, he provides Jesus with the opportunity to teach his disciples about the unity of the Father and the Son.

Philip the Apostle should not be confused with Philip the Evangelist, who was appointed with Stephen to oversee charitable distributions (Acts 6:5).

We know little of James, Son of Alphaeus, except his name, and, of course, the fact that Jesus chose him to be one of the Twelve Disciples. He is not the James of Acts, son of Clopas, "brother" of Jesus and later bishop of Jerusalem and the traditional author of the Letter of James. James, son of Alphaeus, is also known as James the Lesser to avoid confusing him with James the son of Zebedee, also an apostle and known as James the Greater.

As in the case of the other apostles, we see in James and Philip people who became foundation stones of the Church, and we are reminded again that this sort of holiness is entirely the gift of God, not a matter of human achieving. All power is God's power, even the power of human freedom to accept his gifts. "You will be clothed with power from on high," Jesus told Philip and the others. Their first commission had been to expel unclean spirits, heal diseases, announce the kingdom.

They learned, gradually, that these externals were a small part of an even greater miracle inside their persons—the divine power to love like God.

In this time, when we may be able to meditate a little more easily during our vital stay at home regime and with the quiet it brings, we can give thought to how we might feel if we had been called like the Disciples to accept the gifts of God and do the work we were asked to do even if it wasn't quite in our life's plan.

So, let us pray the Collect for today:

Almighty Father,
whom truly to know is eternal life:
teach us to know your Son Jesus Christ
as the way, the truth and the life;
that we may follow the steps
of your holy apostles Philip and James,
and walk steadfastly in the way that leads to your glory;
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.

Regards Alison Radford