

Meditations: May 3, Saints Philip and James, Apostles

Some reflections that can guide our prayer on the feast of Saints Philip and James.

05/03/2024

- Authentic faith draws others
- The apostles' magnanimity and daring
- Living close to Christ spurs us to bring Him to others

THE FEAST DAYS of all the apostles are special days for those who aspire to bring the Gospel message to others. The impelling zeal experienced by the apostles James and Philip is the same that led Saint Josemaría to exclaim: “As he was giving out Holy Communion that priest felt like shouting: this is Happiness I am giving to you!”^[1] — We Christians experience in this world a joy that we don’t want to hide from others. We live close to our Lord: our concerns are his, and his life is ours. And we know that this is the greatest possible happiness. The joy the apostles experienced in encountering Christ spurred them on in their preaching, which is why the faith spread so rapidly throughout the world.

The apostles frequently gathered around Jesus; sometimes on the mountainside, other times around the table. They shared long walks

together. All these shared moments close to Him would never be erased from their mind or heart. We too, through his mercy, live close to Christ. And on experiencing God's love for each of us, we long to "tell others about him, because so much joy cannot be kept in one heart alone."^[2] — We understand, then, why each action, each endeavor of a Christian is apostolate, without needing to see it as something different from our daily occupations. Others recognize this in our closeness, in our serenity despite unpleasant events, in our joy. "The Church grows by attraction. And the faith spreads by example, even martyrdom, as happened with the apostles Philip and James. When others see consistency between what we do and what we say, curiosity always arises: 'Why does that person live like this? Why is their life one of service to others?' And that curiosity

is the seed that the Holy Spirit takes and makes use of.”^[3] —

Our Lord’s entire life, his words, his deeds, his passage through this world, transforms us. Saint Paul reminds the Corinthians that our life is grounded on that message and that it saves us. This is a true, wonderful mystery, a memory that is more than a memory, because it is present in our own lives. “Thomas Aquinas, using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a *habitus*, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us”^[4] —
-- a life that the apostles who we remember today experienced in its fullness.

ONE OF THE ASPECTS that we find attractive about the life of the apostles is their ability to dream big and to launch out to attain their dreams. They aren't deterred by obstacles because they know that Christ has already overcome them and that not even death is stronger than God's power. They are filled with daring and magnanimity, virtues that spur us to undertake an exciting mission, in which we know we are not alone, but can count on God's strength. Nothing can stop or frighten those who experience our Lord's presence in their daily lives.

“Magnanimity means greatness of spirit,” Saint Josemaría said, “a largeness of heart wherein many can find refuge. Magnanimity gives us the energy to break out of ourselves and be prepared to undertake generous tasks which will be of benefit to all . . . The magnanimous person devotes all his strength,

unstintingly, to what is worthwhile. As a result he is capable of giving himself. He is not content with merely giving. He gives his very self. He thus comes to understand that the greatest expression of magnanimity consists in giving oneself to God.”^[5] —

We can recall here the magnanimity of the apostles Philip and James. Philip spoke enthusiastically about Jesus to his friend Nathanael and asked Jesus, with great simplicity, to see the face of the Father. According to tradition, he went to Phrygia to spread the Gospel and died a martyr. James, in turn, who was a relative of our Lord, became bishop of Jerusalem. The two were pillars of the nascent Church, and didn't hesitate to risk their own security to spread the divine message of joy wherever the Holy Spirit led them.

In order to grow in daring “let us look at Jesus. His deep compassion reached out to others. It did not

make him hesitant, timid or self-conscious, as often happens with us. Quite the opposite. His compassion made him go out actively to preach and to send others on a mission of healing and liberation. Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak, yet we hold a treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier. Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission.”^[6]

THEIR MESSAGES GOES OUT through all the earth (Ps 19:4), we recite with the psalm on the feast of Saints Philip and James. Today is a good day to foster in our soul the desire that Christ's voice may reach all the corners of our world and every epoch in our history. We know that

apostolate is not an activity that is “added on” to our normal occupations. In truth, if we open our life to the Holy Spirit, if we live by faith, we are apostles at every moment of the day. “Faith is not only the recitation of the Creed, although it is expressed in it. Passing on the faith does not mean giving information, but strengthening a heart in faith in Christ. Passing on the faith is not something that can be done mechanically, like someone who says: Look, take this book, study it and then I will baptize you. The right path is another: it is about passing on what we ourselves have received. That is the challenge of each Christian: to be fruitful in passing on the faith. And it is also the challenge of the Church: to be a fruitful mother, to give birth to her children in the faith.”^[7] —

We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote,

Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (Jn 1:45), Philip told his friend Nathanael. The Apostle James the Lesser, on his part, asked: *What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?* (Jas 2:14). The entire Christian path is condensed in these two passages: getting to know Christ ever more fully, living close to Him, because this is what will spur us to bear witness to Him in our own environment. Friendship with Jesus impels us to help those who don't know Him and to be eager to bring that supernatural joy to everyone. We can ask our Lord to grant us the eager longing that the apostles had to spread the faith. Like them, we too want to proclaim with our whole lives that nothing can fill the human heart more fully than Christ Jesus. We can turn our eyes to our Lady, and ask her to strengthen our hope and help us to "dream big," to live with magnanimity and daring.

[1] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 267.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 314.

[3] Francis, Homily, 3 May 2018.

[4] Benedict XVI, *Spe salvi*, 7.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 80.

[6] Francis, *Gaudete et exultate*, no. 31.

[7] Francis, Homily, 3 May 2018.

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