

Feast of St. James

I take my text from St. Matthew's Gospel:

Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Today, we are celebrating the Feast of St. James, Apostle and Martyr, and cousin of our Lord. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred, executed in the year 44 by the sword at the order of King Herod Agrippa. Perhaps, it was his fiery temper that led to his death. He and his brother, John, were nicknamed *Boanerges (Bō-ah-nur-gees)* or *Sons of Thunder* because of their temperament.

James, John, and Peter are often linked together in Scripture and were present on the mountain at the **Transfiguration of Jesus**. We celebrate the **Transfiguration** on August 6th.

Even though we are celebrating the Feast of St. James, the passage from Matthew takes in an interesting, even complex direction from worldly ambition to the cup of martyrdom; yet we find that the cup does not always mean death or martyrdom, as we saw in the Apostleship of St. John.

Simple put, the cup represents the absolute commitment of self to Jesus Christ wherever that may lead, including the ultimate sacrifice of one's life.

For James it was death by the sword but for John it was a long life of service, a commitment to our Saviour that was costly yet reflected the Love of Christ.

All of the Apostles did drink of the cup that Jesus drank of and were baptized in his baptism. James was first and John was last, though John died a natural death at an old age; but his service was not without suffering.

Yet it does not end there. The cup is for everyone baptized in the death of Christ, for it is through baptism that we come to share in the cup. Through his Death on the Cross and Resurrection, the cup means much more — it is indeed the Cup of Salvation; it is the cup of commitment; it is the cup of service to our Lord, to his Church, to our brothers and sisters in Christ, and to our communities, our neighbors, and those who need our love and benevolence.

The extension of the meaning of the cup from that of suffering and death to include service above self is reflected in the words of our Lord at the end of this passage from Matthew:

...but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosever will be chief among, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

That cup to which Jesus refers has been passed on to us and means something different for each of us. But foremost in our lives as Christians, it means an absolute commitment to Jesus Christ.

As we receive the Cup of Salvation at the Altar, we are also sharing the cup of commitment, whether it leads us to suffering and death for his Sake or to other sacrifices less costly.

Perhaps, though not mentioned in the passage but certainly present in the tone of Jesus, the greatest expectation is sharing in the Love of Christ and spreading that love abroad.

When Jesus drank of his Cup, he did so out of love, the greatest of all love. We see **that** reflected in the lives of the Apostles as epitomized by John and so eloquently expressed by St. Paul in the 13th chapter of his Second Letter to the Church at Corinth.

Certainly, there is more to be drawn from this passage from St. Matthew, as we witness a patient and kind Saviour in mediating the earthly ambitions of his band of followers and impressing upon them the ultimate goal to which they must strive — commitment to him, love to the nth degree, and service about self, all of which lead to eternal life.

Commitment to Jesus Christ — in a secular world this is becoming more and more difficult, indeed, many have and do suffer today for their commitment to Christ. Perhaps, there has been no time in history when some suffering wasn't required. For many this has meant giving up their lives as martyrs of Christ. Those who have died for their faith around the world certainly are martyrs. They have shared that cup with Jesus and have joined the Saints in Heaven.

Love to the nth degree — truly we should love God to the nth degree. But, if we do, we should also love our neighbors, love all of God's Creatures, especially the human kind, which are the most difficult to love. Take note. That divinely inspired love is not reserved just for family and friends, not just for a select few, but for everyone.

Service above self — Jesus expressed it most emphatically when he said that he came not to be ministered unto but to minister. How often have we seen this as a motto — *service above self*. How often have we taken it to heart, contemplated what it really means, and put it into action?

And we should not overlook kindness and patience, the kindness and patience Jesus showed to his Apostles. Despite their blindness and obtuseness, our Lord does not lose patience with them; rather, he gently teaches them and leads them into the **Truth**.

We talk of the patience of Job but what about the patience and kindness of our Lord? Can we emulate him in our daily lives?

There is one final but important point in this passage. At the very end, Jesus adds:*and to give his life as a ransom for many*.

A ransom for many — what is a ransom except a payment to liberate someone — but from what and to whom?

Perhaps, suffice it to say that the ransom was paid to the power of evil to liberate us, made in the Image of God, from sin, from the grip of that evil power that had overwhelmed us and kept us from God.

That was Christ's Cup. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves — we could never overcome the power of evil and sin. For this he drank the cup and paid the ransom with his **Death on the Cross**, the shedding of his blood, with which to cleanse our souls and to wash away our sins.

We have covered a lot of territory in looking at this passage from St. Matthew — it should speak to each of us, especially as we come to the Altar to drink of the **Cup of Salvation** and to contemplate *what is our cup*.