

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

James and John left their boats and their father Zebedee to follow Jesus. He called them away from a life of fishing, to a life of catching men. They were the third and fourth men called by the Son of God to be His Disciples, and then sent out into the world as Apostles. Zebedee's sons were known for their forceful ways. When the Samaritans did not welcome Jesus, they asked if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy them, as Elijah had done before the prophets of Baal. Perhaps that is why the Lord called James and John "boanerges", "sons of thunder". But the Apostolic Ministry would not be one of calling down fire upon men. Fire would come, but theirs was to preach Christ and Him crucified that hearing, men be saved.

For his faithfulness, Zebedee's son James, James the Apostle, James who the Church calles Greater, holds the honor of being the first Apostle martyred. His neck met the blade of Herod's sword, fulfilling Jesus' Words "you shall drink the cup I drink, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with" So does St. Paul call the Apostles men made a spectacle to the whole world, "men condemned to death." Those who go forth in the Name of the Lord, those who preach and teach the Truth of Christ crucified and risen, even Vicars, can expect from the world no better treatment than the world gave our Lord.

Perhaps James got his boldness from his mother, who was bold to request of the Christ a place of honor for her sons. Which of us would not want the same for our family? And yet our Lord does not answer her. Instead He questions James and John about their willingness to suffer. In answer, what our Lord promised is not that James would be exalted, but that he would taste of Christ's sufferings. And taste of them he did, served up on Herod's blade. Still, his mother's request was honored. His name is inscribed on one of the twelve foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem, for he lived and died an Apostle of the Lamb.

What the mother of St. James asked of our Lord is the same thing that you have desired – that you achieve heaven. But just as the path of the Apostles is marked with their blood, so must the door to heaven be opened to you by the shedding of Blood. For without the shedding of Blood there is no forgiveness for sins. And your sins, the sin in which you were born, and the sins you have committed each day since, have won for you not heaven, but hell.

Hell is prepared for those who think one thing and say another. The Bible calls it hypocrisy. How many times have you held contempt in your heart for someone, and yet pretended to be nice to them, later backbiting and gossiping about them, assassinating their character with the blade of your tongue? Perhaps at the last family reunion? Perhaps at the last Synodical convention?

So you see that by yourself you can not overcome the sin within you. No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison, for what is in the fallen heart is expressed by the tongue. That is what defiles a man. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

And do not run to the Eighth Commandment, and claim that being duplicitous is “putting the best construction on everything.” The Commandment requires that you be pure of heart, and that speaking well of your neighbor flows from a heart that truly loves him. But that is not what you have done. And so heaven has been closed to you, and to all sinful men.

But thanks be to God, there is one that holds the keys to death and Hades. Thanks be to God, that the One Man who was truly pure of heart, the One Man that kept the Commandments, the One Man Who never sinned, One born of the Virgin by the Holy Spirit, the Son of God, shed His Blood for you. The same Lamb, the perfect Lamb without spot or blemish Who drank from the cup of God’s wrath, drank that bitter cup for you.

He was baptized, and then washed in His own precious Blood, the Blood He wept as tears in Gethsemane while St. James slept, the Blood that covered Him in a crimson flood as He hung on the cross. And this He did for you. He died for your sins, that believing in Him, the heaven that Zebedee’s wife sought for her sons would freely be made yours.

Thanks be to God, that in His great mercy you are not baptized with the bloody baptism that He was baptized with. You are baptized with the baptism that He gives, Holy Baptism, Baptism with water set apart for holy use as He was baptized at the baptizer’s rough hand. It is Baptism, rebirth by Water and the Spirit, that conveys to you the forgiveness that Christ won for you by the shedding of His Blood. It is baptism in the Name of the One that rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven to open heaven to you.

Thanks be to God, that the One that holds the keys to death and Hades gave the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to His Holy Church. For He breathed upon St. James and the other Apostles and gave them the Office of the Keys, the Office given by Christ to the Pastor, the Keys to loose and to bind sin, the Keys to open heaven by the pronouncement of the forgiveness that the Lord of the Church won for all men, the Office to which our Vicar aspires and for which he prepares by his time among us.

By the saving Word of God preached and read the Lord works faith in you, faith that trusts in the Christ that St. James followed, the Christ that died to win heaven for St. James, the Christ that died and rose and ascended to win heaven for you.

Thanks be to God, that you do not drink the cup that He drank. Rather this day He makes you one with the saints in heaven, one with St. James and the Apostles and the Evangelists and the Martyrs and the heavenly host, as the Body and Blood of their Lord and yours is place into your mouth and poured across your lips. You drink the Cup of Salvation. By this great Mystery your worship here is joined to their worship in heaven. In this Holy Communion you are made one with them, one Body of the same Head, who is Christ, Whose Body you eat and Whose Blood you drink. And the heaven that Zebedee’s mother asked for her sons, the Son of God gives to you. Believing in Him, dear Christian, your sins are forgiven, and heaven is open to you.