

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction on the Vigil of
the Feast of Saint James the Apostle
July 24, 2016
+

When the two ardent sons of Zebedee, James and John, came to Jesus with their request, it was to sit at the Lord's right and left in His Kingdom. And it is instructive for us to pay attention to the response from the Lord. For in point of fact Christ Jesus deals with us in the same way.

Our requests seem to us decent and honorable. But upon closer examination they often have mixed motives. James and John loved Our Lord, and they wanted to be loyal. But in their enthusiasm they took low aim. James and John sought distinction rather than service. At the time they made their request, these two men had already spent considerable time with Jesus and had heard His teaching and preaching. But they were still ignorant of some basic facts. First, Christ shows no partiality or favoritism. Second, His Kingdom does not have a material component as its reason for being, as if there would be a board of directors' room where cabinet officers met. Third, the brothers' request for the chief seats in the Kingdom revealed a misunderstanding of the perfect love of the Holy Trinity. And so, "It is not mine to give" was the Lord's gentle and patient reply.

In light of this, it is profitable for us from time to time to take stock of our own spiritual superficiality. Are we also dealing with Jesus out of our ignorant and inadequate conception of the true nature of things? If the answer is yes, then no wonder there seems no definite answer to our prayers. So then where is the good news? For James and John it is they had a good underlying intention. They were much like Martha of Bethany in last Sunday's gospel. She got in a stew because her good intention, which was to properly serve a meal to honor the Lord, caused a lack of charity towards her sister. Her anxiety was the misdirected outcome of her affection for Jesus.

There is something like that in the request of James and John. They desired to be near Jesus. And it was this genuineness that comes out in the subsequent conversation. Christ does not rebuke James and his brother. The Lord's divine charity weighs their mixed motive and concentrates on the good. Inexperience, ignorance, and superficiality are all there. But these are no obstacles where the request comes from a good and honest heart. For as the Lord once reminded the

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction on the Vigil of
the Feast of Saint James the Apostle
July 24, 2016
+

prophet Samuel when about to select a new king for Israel: “God does not see as man sees but looks on the heart.”

“Peter do you love Me?” Jesus later asked the Zebedee brothers’ colleague and leader. And Peter said *yes*. But he couldn’t point to anything in his conduct to back up his claim. Thank God for Peter, for James and John, and for you and me, Our Blessed Lord looks on the heart. For Jesus sees not only what we are but what we shall be through His grace. That is one of the many reasons we call His Gospel *good news!*