

Philip said unto him, Lord, show us the Father.

Fifty years ago it might have been Michael or John or David; or Lisa or Susan or Karen. Seventy years ago it was Mary or Linda or Barbara; or Robert or William or Charles. During the past decade it's been names like Noah and Liam and Lucas and Jackson and Jacob; and Emma and Sophia and Olivia and Charlotte and Ava and Chloe. Every generation has those the names that predominate. So, some of you may have gone to school with a handful of Susans or a collection of Jacksons or Jakes. Thus it has been; thus it shall be, for all time.

And it was no different in the time of Jesus. But back then the names might have been Simon or Joseph or Judas or John. Or Mary or Martha or Anna or Salome.¹ You can't help but notice how some names show up over and over again in the New Testament: more Johns and James and Marys than we can keep straight. Which can make the Church's commemoration of St. Philip and St. James on the first day of May incredibly confusing.

When the Church celebrates the Apostles Philip and James the first thing that we first have to do is to determine which Philip and which James we're talking about. Is it James, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John? Or James the Just, the Lord's brother, the leader of the Church in Jerusalem? Or James the author of the Epistle? Or James the son of Clopas, the brother of Joseph? Or James the father or brother of Judas? And even if we get all that figured out, we then have to wrestle with the question of Philip. Is the Philip who is listed amongst the 12 apostles, whom the church commemorates this day, the same as the Philip who is appointed by the apostles to serve as one of the first seven deacons? You see what I mean: imagine being a teacher of a class and trying to figure out which Megan or which Charlotte; or which Jake or which Lucas you're talking about.

Now, as you may know, the Church remembers and celebrates the witness and work of the apostles throughout the Church year. Most get days on their own: such as Peter in June and Matthew in September and Andrew in November; a few, like Philip and James, on May 1st, and Simon and Jude on October 28th, get grouped in pairs. And, as you've no doubt noticed, some apostles play very prominent roles in the Gospel accounts, such as Simon Peter and John; while others remain virtually silent.

The James that the Church celebrates at this time of year is James, the son of Alphaeus; likely the one mentioned in Mark's Gospel as Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ. James the Younger. Or James the Little. Or James the Minor. Or James the Less, as the Church has come to call him. But I'm afraid that having said that much about him, we can say little more, because he remains completely silent in the New Testament. Never says a word. We only know about him because he's named in the various lists of the apostles which are recorded in the Gospels. And other than a tradition that he died the death of a martyr in Egypt, we know very little about what happens to him later in life.²

¹ "Palestinian Jewish Names," in R. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017 (2nd ed.), pages 67-92.

² Philip Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church: with a General Introduction to Church History*, page 389 (New York: Charles Scribner, 1853). Citing [Nikephoros](#), *Historia Ecclesiastica* II:40.

In contrast, Philip the Apostle shows up a handful of times; and he has several things to say in John's account, where after having first met Jesus, he immediately goes to find his friend Nathanael; and later on asks Jesus how they might feed so many in the wilderness before Jesus feeds the people, with bread and fish; and later works with Andrew to bring some Greek speaking Jews to meet Jesus; and, in the passage that serves as our Gospel, Philip asks Jesus to show them God the Father. But that's pretty much it. And there's not much to add to the story. There are some traditions that Philip later worked in Phrygia and was martyred in Heirapolis, in what is now Turkey.

Which leads to a fairly obvious question: so what? Why take the time to remember them? Why set aside a day to commemorate two men whose part in the Christian story, the story of Christ and the story of the Church, seems so incredibly insignificant?

Well, perhaps for this reason. So much of what we are called to do every day for Christ and his church will be incredibly insignificant. Not the kinds of things that ever get written down. Not the kinds of thing that gets into the books or even on TV. A few will be called to do amazing things; but for most of us the things that we do because we are followers of Christ will leave little in the record of the times in which we live. But they will leave a record in the hearts and minds of those we touch.

As we just heard, in the Gospel appointed for St. Philip and St. James, Philip asks Jesus to show them the Father. And Jesus tells Philip that he been doing that all along. That to see him is to see the Father; because he and the Father are one, he says.

And that tells us what it means to be a follower of Christ. When people see us; when they see what we do at home or at work or in the community, do they see Jesus? Does the work that we do, the things that we say, the values that we live out in our lives; do all of these things manifest the love and compassion that marked Christ's life? Do we, as members of the Body of Christ, make Christ present in their lives? Do they see Jesus in us?

A long time ago Jesus offered us something incredibly simple. Jesus spoke about the eternal value of sharing something as small, something as insignificant, virtually worthless; something as tiny as a cup of cold water.³ Not earth-shattering. Not newsworthy. But kingdom-worthy. Because, in Christ, love is all about doing the little things. Every day. Even when nobody notices. Especially when nobody notices. Day by day offering our time and our talents and our treasures to help and encourage and support others. Taking care of the Body of Christ; and especially taking care of the weak and the vulnerable and the marginalised. Especially when nobody notices. Looking after the little things, day by day, and letting the big picture take care of itself.

As Mother Teresa once said:

"We can do no great things; only small things with great love."⁴

So, maybe that's the lesson that we might learn from St. Philip and St. James. Doing the little things of great love; every day; even when no one is watching. Especially when no one is watching.

³ St. Matthew 10:42

⁴ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1979/teresa-lecture.html