



Feast of St James, Apostle



Date: Friday, July 25, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7–15

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126:1b–6 | **Response:** Psalm 126:5

Gospel Acclamation: John 15:16

Gospel Reading: Matthew 20:20–28

Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

My brothers,

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of Saint James, Apostle and Martyr, our readings invite us to reflect on the true nature of greatness in God’s kingdom, a greatness found not in worldly ambition, but in humble service and the willingness to embrace suffering.

It starts with a mother’s bold request, and it ends not with a throne but a cup. The Gospel today begins not with drama, but with a simple, familiar scene: a mother kneels before Jesus, asking that her sons—James and John—be given places of honour. One on His right, one on His left. It sounds like ambition, and perhaps it is. But it also sounds like love—the kind of love that wants to see your children protected, praised, remembered. Who among us hasn’t known someone like her? A mother hoping her sons might rise above their beginnings, escape the long shadows of fishing nets, find something more.

But Jesus answers gently and clearly: “You do not know what you are asking.” Because His kingdom doesn’t run the way the world does. There are no seats of privilege. There is only a cup. A cup of suffering, of surrender, of being poured out. Not climbing upward, but emptying downward—like water searching for the lowest place.

And James is listening.

He who once wanted to call down fire from heaven now hears of another fire: the fire of love that costs everything. In time, he will be the first apostle to give his life for Christ. Acts tells us he was killed by the sword. He will drink the cup.

James, called a Son of Thunder, had to become something quieter. Not noise, but nourishment. Not storm, but steady rain. Thunder shakes the skies—but it is rain that feeds the seed. And James becomes that quiet grace, not through force, but through following.

We see the same truth in Paul's words to the Corinthians. He speaks of treasure in clay jars—plain, breakable, everyday vessels. The treasure is Christ, but the jar is us. Chipped. Fragile. Flawed. Paul doesn't pretend otherwise. He speaks of being struck down, perplexed, worn thin. But he also speaks of something deeper: of life leaking through those very cracks. God's strength shines through the places we try to hide.

We don't need to look far to find clay jars. We see them in each other—in the catechist with chalk-stained fingers, in the young man running a tuck shop to send his sister to school, in the sister serving lunch before she's had her own. We see it in the dry fields where harvests depend not only on rainfall but on fairness. But Paul reminds us: these are not obstacles to grace. They are its doorway. God doesn't wait for our strength. He begins with our weakness.

That same promise is sung in Psalm 126. "Those who sow in tears will reap with joy." The people of Israel knew what it meant to go out weeping, carrying seed. They had tasted exile, loss, shame. But they also believed that God would bring them home. The Hebrew word for "return"—*shuv*—also means to repent. The journey back to God is a turning of the heart. And it often begins in sorrow. But that is not where it ends. God turns mourning into music, grief into grain. And so they sow anyway. That is the stubborn hope of the poor. The hope that still plants seed in dry ground. The hope that dares to believe: joy is coming.

It's this kind of hope—and this kind of quiet, grounded leadership—that Jesus speaks of when the other disciples begin to grumble. Maybe it was jealousy. Maybe it was fear. We know that voice: Why them? Why not me? But Jesus doesn't rebuke them. He gathers them. He reminds them of the way things usually go—how rulers throw their weight around, how authority so often becomes control. "It must not be so among you." In His kingdom, greatness doesn't come from visibility but from service. "Whoever wants to be great must be your servant"—*diakonos*, the one who waits at table. And "whoever wants to be first must be your slave"—*doulos*, one with no status, no rights, no claim but love. Not honoured. Hidden. Not over others, but given to them.

This is not soft. It is the steel of the Gospel. The strength of the One who kneels to wash feet. The strength of the One who hangs on a cross rather than raise a sword.

Catholic Social Teaching echoes this same call. It reminds us that dignity is not earned through wealth or education—it is given by God, and it belongs to everyone. Whether one is selling tomatoes at the roadside or signing government papers in an air-conditioned office, the worth is the same. But here in our own land, where so many decisions are made far from the field, far from the queues, far from the daily struggle, we are being invited to reimagine leadership—not as command, but as communion. Pope Leo XIV puts it plainly: “Peace is the fruit of participation.” When the poor are listened to, when the voiceless speak and are heard, something deeper than policy begins to heal. The whole body breathes again.

James, who once wanted glory, had to be reshaped. So must we. He who said quickly, “We are able,” would later prove it not by fighting, but by giving everything. And that is why pilgrims still walk to Santiago. Not to find status, but to find silence. Not to be stronger, but to be changed.

In the First Week of the Exercises, St Ignatius places us at the foot of the cross. And he gives us three questions—not for saints, but for us:

What have I done for Christ?

What am I doing for Christ?

What ought I to do for Christ?

Today, James hands us a cup. It is not made of gold. It is cracked. It is heavy. But it is full of grace.

Will we drink?

Let us carry this into prayer:

- Where, this week, am I tempted to chase control or recognition—rather than serve quietly and deeply?
- Where do I feel most fragile—and how might God be working through that very weakness?
- Where is Christ inviting me to drink the cup—not with fear, but with love?

Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-07jul-25-yc-ot-16/>

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.