

May 3, 2020-Fourth Sunday of Easter

James the Lesser

Today's feast of SS. Philip and James honors James, son of Alphaeus, who is listed four times in the New Testament as one of the Twelve.

James is often called "the Lesser" to distinguish him from James, son of Zebedee, "the Greater." Perhaps James is called "Lesser" because he was the younger (or the shorter) of the two James, or because he was called by Jesus to become a disciple after the call of James the Greater.

James the Lesser was a key figure in the early Church. He was one of the first apostles to see the risen Christ, and is thought to be the James mentioned as head of the Church in Jerusalem. Tradition says St. James the Lesser was clubbed to death in the spring of 62 A.D. for refusing to renounce his faith. Josephus says he was stoned to death a year earlier.

St. James the Lesser is the patron saint of pharmacists and Spain.

The Basilica of the Holy Apostles in Rome has the relics of St. James and St. Philip under the main altar, and that is why they are honored together in today's feast.

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### **'Imperfect' apostles offer hope**

The disciples were anything but perfect, and the Gospels tell me more about their faults than their virtues.

I know that they bickered, and they fought over who was first and who was last. They were dense. They frustrated Jesus. They doubted. They wanted power. Peter denied Jesus. They deserted him. They didn't even come to his funeral. They were full of problems, and they were the same until the day they died.

They weren't famous either. I don't hear anything more about them after Pentecost. Oh, I hear a little about one or two (Peter, of course), but mostly all I have are legends about the apostles. Most of the apostles are never spoken of again in the rest of the Scriptures.

Jesus doesn't expect me to go and be perfect, or to be famous. But Jesus does expect me to be great, and he put greatness within my reach.

I can't walk on water, but I can be a foot-washer, and Jesus said that's what greatness is. He never said to walk on water like he did. He just told me to wash feet like he did.

That is greatness.

After he breathed forth the breath of God over the disciples, Jesus commissioned them to go out and be the greatest forgivers in the world. That wouldn't make them famous. It wouldn't make them perfect. But it would make them great.

I'm still a sinner, I'm still going to be whatever I am, a person who may be impetuous, get angry, etc.

But the breath of God that is within me calls me to greatness.