

Feast of Saint Philip and Saint James

I take as my text today from the Gospel of St. John:

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.

As today we celebrate the Feast Day of Saint Philip and Saint James, we find that we really know very little of them, outside of their mention in the New Testament. Philip is mentioned several times in the Gospel of St. John, more specifically with his conversion, his doubt before the feeding of the multitudes, his bringing of the heathens of Jerusalem to Jesus, and his asking Jesus to show the Apostles the Father.

As for St. James, even less is known but he is most likely the son of Alphaeus, whose wife is the sister of the Virgin Mary. He was also known as James the Less. The "Less" could have meant either "younger" or simply "short". He is not the James who wrote the Epistle.

The martyrdom of both Philip and James is left to tradition, which puts Philip's death in Turkey, while James died in Egypt.

What is interesting is that in the Gospel passage chosen for this feast day neither Philip nor James is mentioned. It comes to us from the Sarum Missal, by way of the 1549 Prayer Book. Yet, the passage is one of the most poignant in terms of Christ revealing the Father and himself to his Apostles. It opens up to speculation the concepts that have developed concerning heaven and Christ's return.

It is a Gospel passage that must be approached by biting off bits and pieces.

While it is difficult to decide which piece to examine, there is recorded this exchange between and Philip, when Jesus makes a simple statement:

And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

But Thomas says to Jesus:

Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

Jesus' reply is a phrase we have heard quoted so many times:

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

The Way, the Truth, and the Life, three basic concepts of Jewish religion, and Jesus Christ is telling his Disciples that these three find their full realization in him.

For instance, the Way. If we are traveling, we may use a road map to find our way to where we are going, or we may even ask directions. But these aids fall short of someone actually leading us, taking us to our destination. They don't just show us the way but become the way.

Thus, we can begin to realize what Jesus is saying — he doesn't just show us the way to eternal life, he leads us, instructs, comforts us; indeed, it is as if he takes us by the hand and brings us to our Heavenly Home.

So, it is with Truth. Jesus doesn't just teach us what is morally right and true; he is the Truth. As he taught his Disciples the truth; he is that truth, that moral perfection. He embodies truth.

And Jesus is Life, just as he said. In him is life, in him is love that makes life worth living — and that through his precious Body and Blood, as we say in the Prayer of Consecration, *we are made one body with him that he may dwell in us and we in him.*

So, perhaps, we can now see more clearly what Jesus meant when he said in reply to Thomas:

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

And we find something else. Jesus is not just the *only* Way to the Father but it is in Jesus that we can see what God is like. In him alone is there access to the Father; he alone can lead us into the presence of God.

Now, if we take in the entire Gospel passage, we begin to see what life is and will be with Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. It is life based on love, Divine Love in which Jesus dwells within us, and we dwell in him.

In accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we acknowledge an eternal Truth, the moral perfection to which we aspire, with him taking our hand, becoming the Way to eternal Life, he being the embodiment of that Life. We are enjoined with him in a heavenly mansion that has room enough for all who come to him; indeed, he is the door to that heavenly home through which we must pass, him and only him, Jesus Christ.