

## **Sermon Draft**

**St. Philip and St. James, Apostles, May 1, 2022**

**Sermon: “The Church”**

**Text: John 14:1–14; Ephesians 2:19–22**

We confess that we believe in one holy, Christian, and apostolic Church. It is an article of the faith. It has to be, because the Church can't be seen with our eyes. It is only something we can hold to be true, despite how fractured and broken the Church may seem, how beleaguered she may be, how despised she is by men, and even how we ourselves, so often, fail to hold her in esteem.

The world doesn't know the Church. After all, the world is only focused on itself, curved inward. Sure, it knows of the Church, but it doesn't know her. It regards her as old-fashioned, antiquated. It calls her hateful and violent against the culture what with her views on marriage and the sexes, or the way she doesn't discriminate between people because of the color of their skin. The world has claimed the Church's impact on society, justice, compassion, equality, hospitals, and schools as its own accomplishments, ignoring that her efforts have made countless lives better.

Moreover, it ridicules forgiveness and the hope of salvation in Christ as fantasies for weak-minded people. Without a doubt, the world fails to see the Church as she truly is.

We are tempted by the world to do the same. And on a day when we commemorate two apostles, Philip, and James, we might be inclined to agree. After all, what do we know about these two men? Philip is mentioned a couple of times in Scripture. There's the time when he takes his friend Nathanael to meet Jesus. And then there's the time in our Gospel today where Jesus rebukes his request: ***“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”?’”*** (John 14:8–9).

Then we have James. And not just any James, but James the Lesser. This isn't the James who was one of Jesus' innermost circle, the brother of John. It also isn't James the brother of our Lord, the one who governed the church in Jerusalem. No, the only thing we know about him besides being an apostle is that his father's name is Alphaeus.

And who Alphaeus is we don't know.

Inconsequential men, at least, in the world's view. Perhaps from ours too.

But these are two men the Church has decided to thank God for and on this day. They may seem irrelevant to us. We might even balk and want to ignore them, and many churches will. Too Catholic to talk about the saints. But it's with these inconsequential and irrelevant men that God has chosen to build his Church. Just as he's chosen to build his Church using each of us.

Not seeing things as they truly are is the same problem Philip had with Jesus. You'd think that after traveling around with Jesus for three years, being taught by the Christ, and beholding countless miracles and signs, Philip and the others would've gotten the point. You'd think they would've realized that by seeing Jesus they were seeing the Father. To behold the Son, says Jesus, is to behold the Father.

Why didn't they get it? Well, because they're just like us. Sinful, fallen creatures. Ever curved inward. Distracted by the world and the way it sees things.

Because they were so focused on themselves, and because they listened too much to the world, they failed to recognize what was right in front of them. They saw what they were looking for. They heard what they were listening for. But Jesus did more, said more, and is more. So much more.

Jesus was patient with the apostles. He told them time and again who he is and what he's about. Repeatedly, Jesus taught and performed signs and wonders. Repeatedly, Jesus promised to rescue them from sin, death, and hell. Repeatedly, Jesus foretold that he was going to be handed over to lawless men, be crucified, and then be raised on the third day.

That's what the saints Philip and James ultimately saw. They saw the risen Christ. Touched his pierced hands and side. From his Baptism through his ministry, at his Table, upon the cross, in the upper room on Easter, and to his ascension into heaven, Philip and James were present.

They were eyewitnesses of his majesty. Jesus breathed on them his Spirit, who brought to their remembrance all he had said and done. Along with the other apostles and the prophets of old, saints Philip and James make up the very foundations of the Church.

With Christ Jesus, our Lord, as her cornerstone.

The world may consider these men insignificant. Just as we, in our fallenness, might. But the heavenly Father does not. God builds his Church with such things. The things the world considers foolish are the very things God uses to His glory.

That which has been rejected even Christ our Lord, has become the chief cornerstone. In this way, God alone is glorified. And this is to our good, to our comfort. Because the Church and our salvation don't rely on us in whole or in part. Rather, they rely solely on him. The Church is his creation, his most holy building.

We are the Church. God has given us apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. He uses them to perfect the saints. They've been given to do the ministry. Through them, he builds up the Church. He builds her and grows her into a holy temple, worthy of his presence. And we have been made a habitation of God through the Spirit.

We became the Church through the very Word that Jesus spoke to these saints, Philip, and James, and to the other apostles. They, like St. Paul, were resolved to know nothing other than Christ and him crucified. This Gospel they preached. It is this Gospel that has been preached repeatedly throughout the millennia. And the Holy Spirit worked through this Word of Christ to create faith in the hearts of men, faith in our hearts. It was Christ's Word that made the waters at our Baptisms sacred and saving.

Christ's Word is what joins his body and blood to bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. And it is Christ's Word that God uses to build his Church, spoken by his apostles and those who follow in their train. Christ's Word makes us holy and righteous in the Father's sight.

The Father sees us as we truly are. Not as a sinful, fallen creature, but as a redeemed child of God. For the sake of Christ, we are precious in his sight. Because when he looks at us, the Father beholds his Son. The world despises and rejects Jesus. It sees only a man of sorrows, and one acquainted with grief. Along with the world, we are tempted to hide our faces from Christ, despising him and esteeming him not.

But the Father beholds Christ's sacrifice as the perfect atonement. He beholds, on the cross, his love for the world, his love for you.

We are given to see the Church as she truly is. To turn outward from ourselves and behold her as God does. Not as fractured and broken, not as beleaguered or despised, not as one from whom we have to look away; rather, God wants us to see her as beautiful and radiant, holy and pure, made so by Christ. She is a grand and majestic temple, built up over thousands of years, her spires reaching the heavens of God. She bears the shape of her Redeemer's cross. She is adorned with his love for all creation for the earth, all people, and all creatures. And her voice sings the praises of the One in whose name she has life.

Philip and James have life. They are alive in Christ and will live forever. When we gather in Christ's name, we are joined by all who dwell with the angels and archangels in heaven. Including Philip and James. When we partake of Christ's body and blood at the altar, we give thanks with Philip and James for our most holy communion with God and with one another. In Holy Communion, we are given life together.

This is but a foretaste of the life to come, the resurrection of our bodies and the new heavens and earth. Along with the other apostles, these two men will govern over all believers. They shall, Christ has promised them, sit upon thrones in the new world, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Even there and for all eternity God will use these two sainted men to serve us. Most certainly, this is reason enough today to give God thanks!

See, then, the Church including Saints Philip and James as she truly is. Not as beleaguered, despised, or disdained. Not as irrelevant and inconsequential. Rather, see the Church as she is. Beautiful. Holy. Perfect. Because when we see her truly, we behold her in Christ. And seeing Christ, we behold the Father.

Amen