



**Orthodox Church of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

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James the Just and the Importance of Compromise
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Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Therefore, my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. (Acts 15:19-20)

Every 6 or 7 years the commemoration of St James the Just, the Brother of the Lord, or as we may also say, the Brother of God, falls on a Sunday. While the civil calendar marks this day as November 5, in the Church calendar it is October 23. Those of us who came from the parish we used to have in Westminster remember how we would celebrate this day with the Liturgy of St. James. There are four Divine Liturgy rites in the Orthodox Church. The oldest and longest is credited to St. James and may be used on the day of his commemoration with the bishop's blessing. Since it lasts a good 2-3 hours, however, I wisely did not seek it this year. The second, St. Basil's Liturgy, is a shortened version of St. James; and the third, which we use most Sundays, is St. John Chrysostom, a yet further reduction, shorter than the other two. The fourth of course is the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, which we use on weekdays during Great Lent.

According to Holy Tradition from the Middle East St. James was the Brother, actually the half-brother, of our Lord Jesus Christ. Holy Tradition preserves the truth of this relationship by pointing out that St. Joseph, the betrothed of Mary, was an elderly widower, approximately 80 years old or so. He had been married with children, but his wife had died. The eldest of his sons was Jacobus, or James. When Jesus was alive in His Incarnation Body, He counted His half-brother James among His apostles, specifically among the 70 who had been sent out to preach the Gospel. After His death, resurrection and ascension in heaven, James became the leader of the Mother Church in Jerusalem. He presided at the first Apostolic Council, the Council in Jerusalem around 48 AD, and prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD was martyred. The Pharisees threw him down from the pinnacle of the Temple.

But it is his work as first Bishop, as the one who presided at the council that I want to highlight in this hopefully brief homily today. In the earliest days of the Church there were two general parities. One, headed by St. Peter, emphasized the need for the Church of Jesus Christ to continue the practices of their Jewish tradition: male circumcision, kosher diet and other specific requirements of the Torah. St. Paul emphasized the universality of the Gospel to all peoples, including non-Jews or Gentiles. Their perspectives sometimes clashed. Peter, a Jewish traditionalist insisted on the older ways; St. Paul preached the unconditional mercy of God to all peoples and insisted on the dogma of Justification by Grace apart from the law. The issue was not really resolved until they met before St. James in Jerusalem at the First General Council of Jerusalem.

And this is what I want to highlight. It is preserved in the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke. St. James did not side with either of the two great apostles, Peter or Paul. He urged a compromise. He said that yes, it was not necessary for males to be circumcised in order to enter the Church, and as Peter himself had realized in a dream sent to him by God, it was not necessary to keep a kosher house. God does not save us by virtue of our actions or our adherence to the Law. He saves us because He is merciful. But given that there were still many Jews in the Church who were steeped in their traditions, St. James took several of the most important laws to the Jewish tradition and insisted that they be followed so as not to offend the brethren from the Jewish tradition. All forms of idolatry were of course to be given up by the new Christian gentiles; fornication in any form was to be prohibited. And the ancient practices of abstaining from the consumption of blood, which is the life force of every living creature was to be absolutely followed.

St. James knew what was essential in our faith. He knew that St. Paul was right in insisting that we are saved by God's mercy, by His justification of the sinner. He knew that our relationship of faith would lead to the fulfillment of the Law by producing the fruit of love. And yet, he was a wise bishop of Zion, the first and most important of the churches in Jerusalem. He knew that compromise was necessary so as not to completely offend those who valued the old traditions of the people of the first covenant, the Jews.

The spirit of St. James, the spirit of compromise, give and take, has been missing in the Church

form many, many centuries. For eons. We have been too quick to condemn, to judge and to insist on our own way. We cast out those who see the truth, but who express it in ways we do not approve of. Just think, for example, if the Spirit of St. James had been followed in the 11th century when the Catholic and Orthodox Churches split. Or just think if the Spirit of St. James could be followed among the Orthodox in Ukraine and Russia, or between the ancient rivalries now rekindled in Israel today.

Compromise does not mean giving up essentials. Peter, Paul and James were all in agreement regarding the essentials of the faith. But it means listening and acting with sensitivity and not insisting on one's own way for every little detail. Brothers and Sisters: Remember this little piece of history from the early Church. Act not in judging or condemnation, but in the spirit of our Lord, the spirit of love, acceptance and self-giving.

To Him be all honor and glory forever! Amen.

Fr. Elias

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