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Today we celebrate the Feast Day of St. Philip and St. James, both of whom were among the twelve Disciples of the Lord. An interesting fact about this Feast Day is that it was first written down by St. Jerome who lived in the mid 300's AD and then again by St. Gregory in the 500's AD. However, the Venerable Bede, the Anglo-Saxon Monk and Scholar who lived between 673 and 735 AD, only recorded St. Philip as being celebrated on May 1<sup>st</sup>. St. Philip's hagiography, a "holy biography," expressly states that he was martyred on May 1<sup>st</sup>. While there is some debate about the date of St. James' martyrdom, either being on the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, traditionally the two saints are celebrated together. As the Gospels record Jesus sending His disciples out two by two, and this is one other reason why it is thought that other Disciple's feast days are combined, like the Feast Days of St. Simon and St. Jude, and St. Barnabas and St. Bartholomew, and St. Peter and St. Paul who are always commemorated together .

The history of St Philip and St. James' Feast Day might be boring to some, but the deaths of these two saints are particularly shocking. As if crucifixion was not bad enough, St. Philip was crucified and then stoned to death while he was nailed to the cross. St. James the Less, thought to be the author of the Epistle we heard this morning, was thrown down from the highest part of the temple, and after surviving such a fall, was beaten to death with a fuller's club. A fuller's club is a heavy wooden instrument used to beat the impurities out of wool, sometimes with sharp metal attached to it. Now you might be wondering what these two did to deserve such brutal deaths.

St. Philip was one of the first Disciples to be called by the Lord. He was so close to Jesus that when certain Gentiles sought to speak with Jesus that they went to St. Philip first. We remember also, that when Jesus wanted to feed the multitude in the wilderness, he asked St. Philip, *whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?* After receiving the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, St. Philip went to Scythia, modern day Southern Europe and Asia, and, through his preaching, converted almost the

entire population to Christianity. When he came to Hierapolis in Phrygia, modern day Turkey, he was crucified, but He continued to preach even while nailed to the cross. Finally, in an attempt to stop his preaching they stoned him. He was crucified and stoned to death for preaching Jesus Christ.

The St. James that we also celebrate today is St. James the Less, which is the King James Version's way of saying the younger. His biography is particularly interesting because of the kind of life he lived. His Hagiography records, *James...surnamed the Just, never drank wine nor strong drink, abstained from flesh meat, and never cut his hair nor used ointments. He alone of the Apostles was permitted to enter the Holy of holies. He wore linen garments and was so assiduous in prayer that his knees became hard as a camel's.* After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, St. James was made the Bishop of Jerusalem, and it was to him that St. Peter was sent to tell him that he had been freed from prison by an Angel. St. James presided over the first Council of the Church in Jerusalem which is recorded in the Book of Acts. He also approved the calling of the Gentiles into the Church. St. Paul also refers to St. James only in his Epistle to the Galatians when he writes *But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James.*

It is recorded that *St. James' sanctity of life was such that men would strive with one another to try to touch the hem of his garment.* So holy was he, and so dedicated to Christ was he, that at the age of 96, having governed the Church for thirty years in the most holy manner, steadfastly preaching Christ the Son of God, that he was stoned by being thrown from the highest point of the Temple. And even in death he imitated the Lord, for as he lay half dead on the ground, he raised his hands to heaven and prayed for his persecutors, *Forgive them, O Lord, for they know not what they do.* And while he was praying, he was struck with a fuller's club and died.

May we be inspired by the life and witness of St. Philip and St. James, preaching while nailed to the cross, and killed while praying for those that persecuted them. Did you notice that the Church prays this

morning that we will follow in their footsteps? While we may never find ourselves nailed to a literal cross, or being stoned to death, we as Christians are called to be prepared for martyrdom. And we are called to die spiritually to the world, preferring Jesus Christ to anything the world has to offer. It begs the question, if we were nailed to a cross would we still be trying to preach from it? Do we try to show others the way to Christ even during our trials? Would we be praying for those who were in the process of stoning us? Do we bless those who curse us, and forgive our enemies? Let us start with our living, rather than our dying. Do our lives show others that this faith is worth dying for?

Pray for us St Philip and St James, Amen.