

St. James the Lesser

Feast: May 3



Facts

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St. James the Less, the author of the first Catholic Epistle, was the son of Alphaeus of Cleophas. His mother Mary was either a sister or a close relative of the Blessed Virgin, and for that reason, according to Jewish custom, he was sometimes called the brother of the Lord. The Apostle held a distinguished position in the early Christian community of Jerusalem. St. Paul tells us he was a witness of the Resurrection of Christ; he is also a "pillar" of the Church, whom St. Paul consulted about the Gospel.

According to tradition, he was the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and was at the Council of Jerusalem about the year 50. The historians Eusebius and Hegesippus relayed that St. James was martyred for the Faith by the Jews in the Spring of the year 62, although they greatly esteemed his person and had given him the surname of "James the Just."

Tradition has always recognized him as the author of the Epistle that bears his name. Internal evidence based on the language, style, and teaching of the

Epistle reveals its author as a Jew familiar with the Old Testament, and a Christian thoroughly grounded in the teachings of the Gospel. External evidence from the early Fathers and Councils of the Church confirmed its authenticity and canonicity.

The date of its writing cannot be determined exactly. According to some scholars it was written about the year 49 A.D. Others, however, claim it was written after St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (composed during the winter of 57-58 A.D.). It was probably written between the years 60 and 62 A.D.

St. James addresses himself to the "twelve tribes that are in the Dispersion," that is, to Christians outside Palestine; but nothing in the Epistle indicates that he is thinking only of Jewish Christians. St. James realizes full well the temptations and difficulties they encounter in the midst of paganism, and as a spiritual father, he endeavors to guide and direct them in the faith. Therefore, the burden of his discourse is an exhortation to practical Christian living.

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