

## Art for reflection while we are socially distance but spiritually close

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For the Feast Day of Saints Philip and James celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> May

These two apostles (emissaries) of Jesus are listed as part of the Twelve in the Synoptic Gospels, and in Acts (Mathew 10:1-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16 and Acts 1:13). John's Gospel has no list, but mentions Philip several times.

In 1:45 we read *"The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come, follow me." Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown."*

Although there are slight differences in these lists, Philip always appears as No.5 and James (son of Alphaeus) as No.9. James is the Greek form of the common Hebrew name Jacob, already familiar to us from the Old Testament. However, Philip is a Greek name which has no Hebrew equivalent. Why do we honour them both on the same day, as there is no other association between them in the New Testament?

According to tradition, their bodies were brought to Rome on the same day – 1 May- in the third century, and interred on the site of a church dedicated to them. The church is now called the Church of the Twelve Apostles, but throughout the world there are many churches and schools dedicated to the pair.



Church of the Twelve Apostles, Rome (*Santi Dodici Apostoli*) at which the bodies of Philip and James are interred



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This painting by **Bernardo Zenale** was done for one such church, Santa Maria di Brera in Milan, which later became part of the Brera Gallery, the main art gallery of the city. The painting was done for the Busti family, and shows Philip and James presenting three members of Antonio Busti's family to the infant Jesus.

Philip appears in four other parts of John's Gospel. He introduces Nathanael (also called Bartholomew) to Jesus, (John 1:43-45), is approached by Greeks who want to meet Jesus (John 12:21-23) and, puzzled by Jesus' statement that "If you know me you will know the Father also", he asks for more - "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied". "Jesus responds "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me?" (John 14:7-9). Philip's bewilderment in the face of Jesus' powers is also shown in the fourth incident. At the miraculous feeding of the 5000 "When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." (John 6:5-8).

**Tissot** pictures for us the distribution of the loaves and fishes to the big crowd on the hillside (1886-1896)



Of James, sometimes referred to as "The Less" or "James Minor" – perhaps he was either short or a younger brother! -we read nothing more than his name, but many authorities believe he is to be identified with the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and with the writer of the Letter of James.

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Both James and Philip are believed to have been martyred. When **Rubens** painted his series of the Twelve Apostles at the request of the Duke of Lerma between 1611 and 1613 he showed them with the objects which were traditionally thought to have caused their deaths – James with a forging tool, and Philip with a cross.





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The apostles in Rubens' series are mature men. After receiving the Spirit at Pentecost their lives were devoted to spreading the gospel. Though we know nothing of how or where they carried out this work we know that due to their "hidden witness" and that of others we too can know the Father.