

SCRIPTURE STUDY, SERMON & WEEKLY DEVOTIONS



SANTIAGO
26TH JULY, 2026

Dennis Webster

Revised Common Lectionary Related

James, Apostle and Martyr

Acts 11.27-12.3

Psalm 126

2 Corinthians 4.7-15

Matthew 20/20-28



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Book of Common Prayer (1662) Collects

Grant, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle
Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had,
without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy
Son Jesus Christ, and followed him;
so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections,
may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments:
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



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ACTS 11:27 - 12:3

INTRODUCTION

July's feast days invite us to remember the saints as "stars" whose lives point us toward Christ. Some are widely celebrated—like James, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas—while others are quieter, yet all together they form a witness that holiness is possible in every place, even close to home. These stories aren't meant to be distant history; they are meant to guide and strengthen the Church's life now.

The Sermon centres on Saint James and what his life reveals about Christian calling. James was among the first to follow Jesus, present for moments of glory and intimacy, and confronted with Jesus' hard question about ambition and faithfulness: "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" James' path shows that discipleship is not about status or seats of honour, but about service, surrender, and sharing in Christ's suffering and mission. In the early Church, amid persecution and political manoeuvring, James remained publicly faithful and ultimately became the first apostle to die for his witness—truly "drinking the cup" Jesus spoke of.

From James' story, the Sermon turns to pilgrimage, especially the Camino to Santiago de Compostela—the "field of stars." Pilgrims have long walked not for fame, but out of longing for God, and the journey itself becomes a teacher. The point of pilgrimage is not the distance or the destination, but what is learned "along the Way": renewed faith, deeper prayer, humility, and joy that grows through persevering steps.

Finally, the Sermon widens the meaning of pilgrimage to include the journeys of ordinary life, especially walking with others through suffering and even toward death. Accompanying the dying is described as holy ground where we learn stillness, presence, and "prayer beyond words." In the end, the Christian hope is that all our wandering restlessness gives way to fullness in God's presence, where the long journey reaches its true home. What matters most is not where the journey begins or ends, but what we learn, how we love, and how faithfully we follow Christ on the path.

It does not matter where the journey begins or ends.

What matters is what we learn along the Way,
on the path, in the pilgrimage,
on the Camino.

Sharing the Same Path

July brings cool air and days we know are holy. The saints are lighting us up now, shining on us like scattered stars on the horizon and at our backs; they stand out for us with their faith and courage.

The Church measures time with feasts— grand and simple. James, Mary Magdalene and Thomas are among the great ones. Their days stretch out like golden summer light, requiring us to stop, rest and rejoice. In the north, those will be the high days of summer, and perhaps they even come in a cooler season. But the warmth of their witness does not change.

And other feasts slip by with little notice, kept in one day. We recall the Coming of the Light when hope first hit the Torres Strait with the missionaries. We remember John Fisher and Thomas More who gave up their lives for truth and still hold us up by their courage.

Benedict, Mary and Martha, Joseph of Arimathea, Ignatius— their names are all carefully etched on the calendar's pages. Some feasts are so little noticed, and the stories are still there. Bishop Sydney Kirkby, close to home, is a reminder that holiness grows in familiar soil, in people and places we already know.

The saints are not apart from Christ, and are in a small constellation around him; their lives tell us more about what it might mean to follow him in our own time.

James the Great felt a part of that real, earthy discipleship. He was brave and heartfelt. The Gospels tell us of a mother's bold call to her sons. Some muttered; Salome spoke. Most parents have hopes in their children; few are brave enough to express those hopes.

For James and John the question was a challenge: follow and share the same cup. In Matthew's Gospel we hear it:

Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

And they said, "We can."

And Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left hand is not for me to grant."

It is a quiet answer. Jesus offers no status. These are places belonging to those for whom I have made provision from my Father. He shares in his life and suffering.

In Jerusalem, James came forward as a leader. Peter travelled further afield. Herod Agrippa was troubled by the rising light and tried to put it to rest. Saul was once the toughest opponent, yet now he was delivering the message that he had been trying so hard to suppress. The ancient order felt the ground shift under its feet.

Peter stayed with Simon the Tanner and was sent to see Cornelius. He learned on the way that according to God what is clean should not be deemed unclean. Gentiles and Jews were drawn up by the Spirit. The name "Christian" was first used in Antioch, and gifts were provided for those in need.

James listened, accepted those gifts and mediated disputes that threatened to tear the community apart. His decisions made the leaders angry. And seeing their chance, Agrippa turned against both James and Peter. The Sanhedrin rejoiced. Peter was seized, but an angel of the Lord sent him out. Chains slipped from his wrists. He rose, walked into the night and followed the call.

James did not go back. He kept the Passover open and taught in the open. In the end, he drank the cup Jesus had spoken of. His story prompts us to think about how we witness to faith in our everyday lives.

Herod craved praise and power. In searching for the voice of a god, he lost his own. In the end, he was low, undone from within. One life poured out in love. Another consumed by its own hunger. Even in the face of death, however, the light does not go out.

We are told that Paul wanted to go to Spain, but the road took him to Rome and to martyrdom. So whether he wanted to carry on James's work, we don't know. Legend says James's friends took his bones to the farthest west shore.

At night the stars over Iberia spill across the sky like milk. So in time a monk walked the Way and found a place for James under that shining arch. Pilgrims gathered. A cathedral rose. The Camino was born.

Many know someone who has walked the Camino. Some have walked it themselves. Pilgrimage is not just a number. It is influenced by longing, by the slow journey to trust God more deeply, to walk where Christ leads.

And every 11 years, the Camino will be designated Holy Pilgrimage Road. Pilgrimages arriving on St James's Day will receive a special blessing in 2027. Could we walk this together next year? I am ready to offer again in

2038! But grace is already woven into the life we live and is waiting in the details of each day.

In James we see the faint outline of a call. He heard, “Follow me,” and set out with Peter, John and Andrew, planting seed and trusting in God for the harvest. He swallowed the cup Jesus offered, the first of the Twelve to give his life. But pilgrims walk the Camino with joy, in the Cathedral, prayers rising in the heart of it, a shell in hand to remember what we have learned along the way.

I had expected to have a week off, but it was not to be. The quiet space I had been searching for didn’t come. But I am still grateful. The God who meets pilgrims on the road to Compostela also meets us in hospital corridors, in kitchen sinks, in long conversations late at night, in small daily tasks.

And I want to finish with words from US Baptist mystic, Calvin Miller. For me, they capture something of the heart of pilgrimage, especially for those who walk with the dying or the suffering.

“To go with other people, along with their loved ones, up to the gate of death is to enter Holy Ground. To stand in an awesome place, where the wind of the Spirit blows; to experience peace and grief and insight, intimacy and pain on a scale not ordinarily found in the living. And on the side of the dying, we learn stillness, waiting, and just being: quietness, watching, and prayer beyond words.

“At death, long wandering prayer on earth finally comes to an end. It is time to put away the coracles, destroy the sails, burn the oars and settle into the fullness of the presence we have always wished to be in but now are completely willing to accept. The union we tried to establish now leads us. Our restlessness is over. The compass is thrown away. The voyage ends. Then Christ, who was so far away in the past, comes and says to us loud and clear, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant’”

It doesn’t matter where the journey starts or ends. What matters is what we discover when we go, whether we walk the Camino or walk the quiet paths of our day. Today, when we consider James and all the saints that shine like small constellations around Christ, we may hear again the message: “Follow me.” May we be courageous for the cup set before us, trust for our journey that we did not plan and have eyes to see the quiet grace that’s woven into our common life.

¹ Miller, Calvin *The Path of Celtic Prayer*, Intervarsity Press, Illinois, 2007

Discussion

How do the saints and feast days function like “stars” for you—what stories or people have quietly guided your faith, especially in ordinary seasons?

- Consider who has helped you notice Christ more clearly: a family member, mentor, friend, or a saint’s example. Talk about what practices (remembering, celebrating, telling stories) keep those lights from being “easily forgotten,” and how they might guide your next step.

What does it look like in your life to “drink the cup” Jesus offers—how do ambition, sacrifice, and service get sorted out in your decisions?

- In Matthew 20, Jesus reframes greatness as servanthood rather than status. Share where you feel pulled toward recognition or control, and what it could mean to choose costly faithfulness, patience, or hidden service instead.

What kinds of “chains” have you experienced—fear, resentment, shame, exhaustion—and how have you seen God bring freedom in ways you didn’t expect?

- Acts holds both deliverance (Peter freed) and suffering (James killed), so freedom isn’t always a changed circumstance. Discuss what it means for your heart to be “free” even when outcomes differ, and what support or prayer helps you keep walking.

Why do you think pilgrimage is described as being measured by longing rather than distance, and what longing is most shaping your relationship with God right now?

- The sermon suggests the Camino is a picture of an inner journey: desire for faith, healing, clarity, courage, or peace. Name the longing you carry, and explore what small, faithful steps could honour it this week—practices, relationships, confession, or rest.

What have you learned—or hope to learn—about “holy ground” through accompanying others in suffering, grief, or death, and

| how might that reshape how you live today?

- The closing image highlights stillness, presence, and “prayer beyond words” as a deep form of discipleship. Share experiences where pain or goodbye clarified what matters, and how the promise of Christ’s welcome (“Well done...”) could change your priorities and pace now.



5 Day Devotional

This week’s Devotional invites you to walk the “Camino” of everyday discipleship—learning from the saints, from James, and from the God who meets us on the way. Each day will help you listen again for Christ’s call, receive courage for the cost, and discover joy that grows even through suffering. Wherever your journey begins, God can form faithfulness in you along the path.

Day 1

Matthew 20:22-23

Discipleship often begins with desire—desire for purpose, for closeness to Jesus, even for significance. In the Sermon, James and John stand beside a mother’s bold request, and Jesus responds by redirecting ambition into apprenticeship: “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” The question exposes what we want from Jesus and what Jesus wants for us—communion with Him that includes both joy and cost.

Jesus does not shame their longing; He clarifies it. The “cup” is not a vague religious metaphor but a shared life with Christ, shaped by His humility, service, and suffering love. Your path may not look like James’s, but the invitation is the same: to follow Jesus not only toward blessing, but toward obedience—trusting that the Father prepares what we cannot secure for ourselves.

- What do you most want from God right now—comfort, direction, recognition, healing, or something else? Name it honestly in prayer.
- Where do you feel tempted to chase a “seat of honour” (approval, control, winning, being seen) instead of simply staying close to Jesus?
- What might “drinking the cup” look like in your current season—an act of surrender, a difficult conversation, a hidden service, a patient endurance?

- Pray with open hands: “Jesus, I can’t secure my future, but I can follow You today.” What specific step of following comes to mind?
- Choose one concrete act of humility or service today that costs you something small (time, convenience, pride) and offer it to Christ.

Day 2

2 Corinthians 4:7

The sermon paints saints as stars—guiding lights that reflect Christ rather than replacing Him. Paul reminds us why their lives can shine: “We have this treasure in jars of clay.” The treasure is the life of Jesus; the jar is ordinary, fragile, easily chipped. Saints are not spiritual super-humans—they are people whose weakness became a place where God’s power could be seen.

This reframes your own limitations. Fatigue, unanswered questions, and tender places do not disqualify you from the journey; they can become the very places where Christ’s light breaks through. The Camino of faith is not measured by impressive strength but by faithful dependence—carrying the treasure through everyday steps, trusting God to make something radiant out of clay.

- Where do you feel most like a “jar of clay” right now—emotionally, physically, relationally, or spiritually?
- How have you seen God’s strength show up through someone else’s weakness? What does that suggest about your own story?
- What “treasure” do you need to remember you carry today (forgiveness, hope, Christ’s presence, eternal life)? Name it aloud.
- Is there a weakness you keep trying to hide that God may be inviting you to offer to Him instead? What would offering it look like?
- Reach out to one trusted person for prayer or encouragement this week, not to perform strength, but to practice dependence.

Day 3

Acts 11:29-30

Along the Way, the early Church learned that pilgrimage with Jesus is never solely personal—it becomes a shared responsibility and a shared

care. In Acts, believers gathered gifts “each according to ability” and sent help to those in need. The Sermon notes how the Church learned to recognise God’s work beyond familiar boundaries and to respond with generosity rather than suspicion.

This is one of the quiet marks of holiness: ordinary faith expressed through concrete love. Your Camino includes people God has placed near you—neighbours, coworkers, family, the vulnerable, the overlooked—and the Spirit often guides us by stirring compassion. Giving, serving, and showing up are not distractions from spiritual growth; they are pathways where Christ forms His character in us.

- Who has God placed in your “nearby world” that may need care—practically, financially, emotionally, or spiritually?
- What is one “according to my ability” gift you can offer this week (a meal, a note, money, time, a ride, listening)?
- Where do you feel cautious toward people who are different from you? Ask God to widen your heart without ignoring wisdom or boundaries.
- How might generosity be part of your discipleship right now, not as pressure, but as a response to grace?
- Take one concrete step within 48 hours to help someone—small is fine, but make it real and specific.

Day 4

Acts 12:2-3

James’s story in the Sermon is both sobering and luminous: he “drank the cup” first among the apostles, meeting his end by the sword. Acts records it plainly, without spectacle, reminding us that faithfulness does not guarantee ease. Yet the witness of James also shows that suffering is not the final word; it becomes a testimony that Christ is worth more than safety, status, or approval.

Facing the cost of faith can awaken fear, grief, or resistance—especially when we have stood near pain or loss. But Christian courage is not the absence of fear; it is choosing trust in the presence of fear. The saints do not invite us to chase suffering, but to remain steady when it finds us, believing that God can hold us fast and use our witness to strengthen others.

- What “cost” of following Jesus feels most real to you right now—misunderstanding, inconvenience, loss of control, loneliness, or something else?

- When you feel afraid, what do you typically do—withdraw, perform, numb, control? What might it look like to bring that pattern to God?
- Who is an example of quiet courage in your life or Church? What specific quality do you notice in them?
- Pray for someone who is suffering for their faith or facing serious hardship. Ask God to give them endurance and comfort.
- Write a short sentence of commitment you can return to this week: “Jesus, even if ____, I will ____.” Keep it honest and doable.

Day 5

Psalms 126:5-6

The Sermon ends with the reminder that pilgrimage is measured by longing, not distance, and that the journey teaches us what we could not learn any other way. Psalm 126 holds that paradox: “Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy.” The sowing is real, the tears are real, and yet God promises that sorrow can become soil for joy when placed in His hands.

This is hope for the long Camino—when prayers feel like waiting, when love requires staying, when grief makes time feel heavy. God is not wasting your steps. Even when you cannot see the harvest, He is forming faithfulness, deepening compassion, and preparing a joy that is not fragile. The destination is not merely a place, a milestone, or a blessed day; it is Christ Himself, meeting you along the way and bringing you home.

- Where are you “sowing in tears” right now—doing the right thing without immediate results? Name it before God.
- What kind of joy are you tempted to chase (quick relief) instead of the deeper joy God grows over time?
- How has God already sustained you on your journey in ways you might overlook (people, small mercies, strength for today)? List three.
- What practice could help you walk the Camino with steadiness this month—daily prayer, Sabbath rest, confession, community, Scripture, or serving? Choose one.
- End today with a simple prayer of trust: “Lord, take my sowing, hold my tears, and bring Your harvest in Your time.”

End notes and further reading

Harrington, Daniel J Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew
Moloney, Francis J, SBD, Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of John
Johnson, Luke Timothy: Sacra Pagina: The Gospel on Luke
Collins, Raymond F., Sacra Pagina: First Corinthians
Andrew McGowan substack.com/@abmcg
N.T. Wright, Twelve months of Sundays Year A

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be shaped by love and patience
for God's love is
revealed in lives, not letters.



Tatungalung Totem

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Prepared by Rev'd Dennis Webster, Rector of the Anglican Parish of Paynesville,
Diocese of Gippsland for personal or small group use.

Acknowledgement of use appreciated

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Published every weekend, usually on Saturday, AEST.

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