

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Order of Malta Lourdes Pilgrimage, Opening Mass

*Feast of Ss. Philip and James*

*Order of Malta Lourdes Pilgrimage*

*Opening Mass*

*May 3, 2018*

Most all of us are tired from our travels, so I will try to be brief. By now, I hope, you've had an opportunity to go to your hotel, to freshen up, to have lunch, and to unpack your *luggage*. But this shrine dedicated to Mary, this place of pilgrimage so rich in God's grace – this is the place wherein we leave our *baggage* – that is to say – the ailments and anxieties, broken relationships and sins that we brought with us from our points of origin. Let us entrust them to Our Blessed Lady, Our Lady of Lourdes, asking her powerful intercession on our behalf. Whatever else happens in the days that are before us, let us leave behind our baggage and bring home with us the graces of the Risen Lord, shared most fully by Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, by Mary who is the Health of the Sick.

So, with that I greet the three U.S. Associations of the Order of Malta – the American, the Federal, and the Western. And, most especially, I greet those of you, our *malades*, whom we are privileged to accompany to this holy place, this place of spiritual and even physical healing. In the days ahead, you will be referred to as *malades*, that is, those who are sick. Yet, it is by your witness to the Lord that all of us will be helped to open our hearts more widely to God's mercy, his healing love. Thank you, dear friends, for believing in us and for coming with us. We hope that this pilgrimage will be a time of blessing and healing for you. We are sure that your presence among us will be a tremendous grace and a source of joy that we shall never forget.

As it happens, today's feast day, the Feast of Ss. Philip and James helps us see why and how you, our *malades*, are a very special blessing to all of us who have come to

Lourdes with you. In spite of the blariness induced by travel, please take a deep breath and give me a few moments to make my point. As we read the New Testament, we realize that Ss. Philip and James were very important people. These were numbered among the Apostles upon whom Jesus founded and built his Church. And so we honor these unique witnesses to the Risen Lord from whom we have received the faith that profess down to this very day.

We are also fortunate to know a little about the role of Philip in Jesus' ministry. He was probably Jesus' "advance man", the one who made arrangements and the like as the Lord traveled about. When Jesus wanted to feed a famished crowd numbering about 5,000 people, he turned to Philip to ask where bread for so many could be obtained. When Greek converts to Judaism wanted to see Jesus, they went to Philip for an introduction - in a word, Philip was "the man to see". And in today's Gospel, it is Philip's request, "Show us the Father" - that prompts Jesus to reveal himself more deeply as the only Son of God the Father - "Philip," he said, "he who sees me sees the Father!"

What about James, in this case, "James the Less" as our saint of the day is called? For one thing, James was a "brother", that is to say, a cousin of Jesus. In today's reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, St. Paul tells us that early on the Risen Lord appeared "to James, then to all the Apostles." And in the Acts of the Apostles, in Chapter Fifteen, St. James gives an eloquent speech ratifying the decision to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, to all the nations. What about this apostle's nickname, "James the Less"? It merely means he was younger than the other Apostle by the same name.

So yes, Ss. Philip and James were important people in the newborn Church and I've just offered you examples of why they were important. But the crowning glory of their lives, what makes them so very pleasing in the sight of the Lord is that they were martyrs" They bore witness to the Lord by sharing in his sufferings & reproducing his death. Philip is thought to have been martyred around the year 80 A.D. whereas James gave his life for Christ early on, around the year 61. They suffered in union with Christ and in that way bore witness to Jesus and his saving love for the whole of humanity. That should give us all a clue on how to approach this pilgrimage. Those of us who regard ourselves as healthy and able-bodied, should recognize and reverence the witness you, our malades, are offering us. For like Ss.

Philip and James you are bearing your illnesses and sufferings in union with the crucified Lord and and like these great saints you are thereby bearing witness to Jesus.

What's more, you also come to this place of pilgrimage with an openness to God's will not unlike that of Mary who placed her whole life at the service of Jesus & the Gospel in a spirit of obedience and a spirit of praise. Her whole life can be summed up in two words: "Fiat" - "let it be done to me according to your word!" - and - "Magnificat" - "my soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord." We who have come with you, our malades, wish to absorb something of your trusting faith, something of your ability to give God praise amid the hardships and uncertainty that illness introduces into our lives. In such an atmosphere of faith, aided by Mary's powerful intercession, miracles of grace and miracles of healing can happen: forgiveness of sins; the acceptance of our crosses, including serious illness; the mending of relationships; and who knows what else the Lord may do! All of us can return home closer to the Lord and to one another and to Mary, open as never before to God's will and filled with his praises! Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us! St. Bernadette, pray for us!