

“John Boanerges: who was he?” John 21:20-25

Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, “Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?” When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, “Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!” So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, “If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?”

This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Today we celebrate another festival in our Church year. Obviously you can't compare it with Christmas, but for us as Jesus' disciples, it is still a good reason to celebrate and rejoice.

It is a festival devoted to John, the apostle and evangelist. Therefore for our today's Gospel reading we have these last verses from the Gospel according John. Who was this apostle John? What do we know about him?

It is amazing how much we can learn from the Gospels, from Acts and epistles about John as a person, about his life and his character. Let's try to see who was this apostle, what he was like and how He followed His Lord till the end.

As we can conclude from our four Gospel accounts, it is likely that John's mother and Mary the mother of Jesus were sisters. Yes, John and his brothers James would be Jesus' cousins from their mothers' side.

And if Mary and Salome were sisters, it would make John's mother Salome also a relative of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. Thus John was also related to the family of John the Baptist.

We can see that John came from relatively wealthy family. His father Zebedee owned fishing business, where Peter and Andrew, two other disciples of Jesus also were partners, and they had other hired employees as well.

John's family probably was responsible not only for the fishing part of the business, but also for logistics and sales, as we would call them today. John might have been directly involved in this part of business himself.

It seems that many of their clients lived in Jerusalem, and also the Jewish high priest Anna himself and his household were among their clients and therefore John knew them quite well.

Before John became a disciple of Jesus, he was also a disciple of John the Baptist. He was one of John's disciples standing next to him, when John pointed to Jesus saying: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36)

Andrew and John were those two disciples of John the Baptist, who after John the Baptist's confession about Jesus followed Him. John was among the first disciples whom Jesus called to follow Him. Thus John was together with Jesus from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry.

As we can read in the gospels, John was one of so called 'inner circle of Jesus disciples', together with his brother James, and two others brothers and his fishing business partners Peter and Andrew.

John was together with Jesus, when only a few of Jesus disciples came with Jesus into the house of Jairus, when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter. (Mk 5:37). John was together with Jesus when Jesus was transfigured and when Moses and Elijah appeared to Him, and when Peter offered to make them tents and to stay there. For it was so good to be there.

It was John and James who traveled with Jesus through Samaria, when some of Samaritans refuse to welcome Jesus in their towns. It was John who together with James were so passionate to protect their Master's honor and even asked Jesus: "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54)

Even if it is not explicitly highlighted, John was one of the leaders among the twelve. It was John who rebuked the other guy who cast out demons in Jesus' name. "He is not with us so we said him to stop it." (Mark 9:38)

It was their passionate and probably overly zealous character which earned the two sons of Zebedee nickname "Boanerges", that is, "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). They obviously were passionate and also quite competitive and ambitious young men.

That was John's mother Salome who supported Jesus and His disciples during their travels. And it was Salome who asked this little favor in exchange, a little something for her two beloved sons. Do you know what I am talking about?

"Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." (Mat 20:21) And why not, if she was a aunty of Jesus, and they - His cousins, and John – the disciple whom Jesus loved.

John was together with Jesus when during His last week, Jesus, sitting on the mount of Olives, told His closest disciples what the future is going to look like and what the signs of the end times will be.

And again, it was Peter and John whom Jesus asked to prepare a place for their final Passover meal. (Luke 22:8). That was John, who is called the beloved disciple of Jesus, and who laid next to Jesus during their last meal together. That was him, to whom Peter whispered: “Ask the Master, who will betray Him?”

That was John, whom Jesus called to pray with Him together with Peter and James in the garden of Gethsemane, right before He was betrayed and arrested. It was John who together with the other disciples fell asleep while their Teacher desperately prayed sweating blood: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Mat 26:39)

It was John who followed arrested Jesus to the house of the high priest Anna and it was him who got Peter in the house for he knew the household of the high priest Anna. It didn’t go too well for Peter, for this was there where he denied His Lord. “I don’t know this man!”

That was John, the only one of the disciples who did not abandon his Teacher even at the Cross. That was John to whom Jesus entrusted to take care of His mother saying: “Woman, behold, your son!” Then He said to John, “Behold, your mother!” (John 19:26-27)

That was John who run first to the tomb of Jesus and then waited for Peter to catch up, before they went into the tomb to find that it was empty. So we also know that John was better a runner than the apostle Peter was.

That was John who first recognized Jesus while they were all together fishing after Jesus’ resurrection. That was John who followed Jesus, as Jesus was conversing with Peter in our today’s reading.

And it is John testimony as we read it today: **“This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true.”**

We know that after Jesus’s ascension John was one of the pillars of the Church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9). It was John who together with Peter said to the lame man near the Temple: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (Act 3:6)

That was John who together with Peter was brought by guards before Jewish leaders and prohibited to preach about Jesus’ resurrection. And this is what they replied: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” (Act 4:19-20)

It was John who together with Peter went to Samaria and prayed for the gift of the Holy Spirit to come upon the Gentiles who were baptized by Phillip the evangelist.

There are other stories about John which we know from the Church history. His passion for His Lord and for the truth didn't fade when John grew older. Thus there was this event, which took place in one of public bathhouses in the city of Ephesus.

There was a false teacher named Cerinthus and as he one day entered the bathhouse where John was together with other brother, John jumped up and yelling "Let us flee, lest the building fall down; for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is inside!" run out. I wish we would treat God's truth as seriously as he did.

Finally, that was John who wrote the Gospel according to John. That was John, beloved disciple of Jesus who recorded this precious advice how to love our Lord: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) That was this John who wrote the three letters of John which we today have as a part of our New Testament.

In today's reading Peter ask Jesus about John's fate. Jesus had just told Peter that he will glorify His Lord with His death. This is what Peter did. He was crucified because He wouldn't stop witnessing about what He had seen.

So, what about John, Peter was curious about his close friend. And Jesus replied saying that each of you will have your own mission, that it is not for you to worry what Jesus has prepared for each of us.

The main thing is – follow your Lord Jesus Christ where He leads you, whatever your vocations are. Be faithful and glorify your Lord by what you do, and leave the rest into His hands. He will take care of you.

We know that John was the only one among the twelve apostles, who died from old age. He lived till the very end of the first century. John was still alive when all the Gospels and Paul's letters were already read in congregations as a part of the Divine Service. He lived to confirm the truth of the New Testament writings, which we have today, he was the one who had been an eyewitness of the these events.

According the Church's tradition, John was the youngest among the apostles, and he was also the oldest. There is a remarkable story recorded by one of second century theologians Tertullian. Roman emperor Domitian commanded to burn John alive in a pot with boiling oil, right were Latin Gates in Rome are still today.

However, our Lord had different plans for John. Instead of boiling John kept preaching about Jesus and to the shock of all the present came out of the pot unharmed. On that day many who witnessed this event became Christians.

As the boiling attempt failed, the emperor sent John into exile to the isle of Patmos. While John was there His Lord Jesus Christ showed to His beloved disciple a God's eye view on the Church's history and a glimpse of New Heaven and New Earth where God's chosen people will live together with Him.

We have this vision recorded in the Book of Revelation by John himself. John the apostle lived much longer life than people were expected to in the first century. His Lord kept Him alive until John had fulfilled the purpose of his life.

Some of you may think that you are too young or too old to be able to serve our Lord. Forget about it! As long as we are able to speak we can share the wonderful news about Jesus Christ. Look at the example of John!

And listen once more to the words he wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-- the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you." (1.John 1:1-3).

Why did John wrote all of this? Why are we to follow John's example and faithfully continue to witness about Jesus? Because all these testimonies are preserved for us so that people "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

Rejoice today knowing that John's faithful testimony has reached you and you have eternal life in Jesus name, rejoice for, the Lord willing, many more will enter God's Kingdom through your testimonies as well.

Amen.