

9.17

An Inner Circle: Peter, James, and John

Peter, James and John are often said to have formed an “inner circle” among Jesus’s followers. The trio of Peter, James, and John

- go into the room with Jesus when he raises Jairus’s daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37)
- accompany Jesus when he is transfigured on a mountaintop (Mark 9:2)
- question Jesus privately about signs of the end times (Mark 13:3)
- go apart from the others with Jesus to pray in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:33)

Saint Jerome (ca. 347–420) hazarded a guess as to why three disciples stood out from the larger group of twelve:

Someone may wonder or ask: Why are these three apostles always chosen and the others sent away? Even when he was transfigured on the mountain, these three were with him. Yes, these three were chosen: Peter, James and John. But why only three?

First there is the mystery of the Trinity embedded in this number, a number sacred in itself.

Second, according to Moses, Jacob set three peeled branches in the watering troughs (Gen. 30:38).

Finally, it is written: "A three-ply cord is not easily broken" (Eccles. 4:12).

Peter is chosen as one upon whom the church would be built.

James is the first of the apostles to be crowned with martyrdom.

John is the beloved disciple whose love prefigures the state of virginity. (Homily 77.49)