

Santiago Our Protector

by Doña Conchita Lucero

The HCPL's mission is to preserve the culture. Santiago is very much a part of the New Mexico culture. In the past every village in New Mexico would celebrate the fiesta of Santiago and Santa Anna with a fiesta and dance. If we believe in our mission statement then Santiago is perfect because he is the National Patron Saint of Spain. Need I say more?

St. James is buried in Spain at Santiago de Compostella, the third most traveled Christian pilgrimage site in the world, the first being Jerusalem and second Rome. The huge crowds who traveled El Camino de Santiago, in Spain, would refer to the Milky Way with its myriad of stars as the Camino de Santiago. A certificate stamped with the pilgrim symbol of the concha shell, representing the water of baptism and faith, is awarded to those who prove they traveled the pilgrim route. This is similar to our Chimayo pilgrimage. (Incidentally I prayed to St. James to help us with our monument, during our trip to Santiago Compostella. Last year was El Año Santo. El Año Santo is celebrated every six years when the feast of St. James lands on a Sunday. A plenary indulgence can be earned at this time for those who enter through the Puerta de Perdon).

St. James, as you know, was an apostle. His father was Zebedee, a fisherman and his mother Salome was thought to be the sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Saint James and his brother, Saint John, were the favorites of Jesus. They were also Jesus' cousins. Jesus bestowed upon them the surnames Boanerges meaning Sons of Thunder.

St. James was an educator, he wrote the first epistle. His teachings of the Christian doctrine are published in the Holy Bible, which is the most read and translated book in the world. Santiago is also mentioned in the second most translated book in the world "Don Quixote". Miguel Cervantes explains the Spanish sentiment for Saint James through dialogue between Sancho Panza & Don Quixote. Don Quixote tells Sancho, "Heaven gave to Spain this mighty Knight of the Scarlet Cross for its Patron and

Protector, especially in the desperate engagements ...they invoke him as their protector ...of which I can give you many examples deduced from authentic Spanish histories.”

During Saint James's evangelizing mission in Spain after he gained eight converts in Zaragoza the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared on a marble pillar. She directed St. James to behold the pillar and to build a church upon the site. She promised him that Zaragoza would never lack for Christians. He thanked her for the task. In response for his gratitude the Blessed Virgin Mary gave him an image of the Virgin and Christ Child to place on top of the marble pillar thus the miracle of Pillar. This was the first church on earth to be dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Santiago returned to Jerusalem to continue his evangelization. He had many converts and because of this King Harrod ordered him to be beheaded. Santiago was the first apostle to be martyred. His body was thrown outside of the city to be eaten by animals. Loyal Christians retrieved his body and embalmed his remains. When his body was disinterred for shipment to Spain to everyone's astonishment his head was firmly affixed to his body.

St. James appeared a number of times to our ancestors after his death. The first time was 844 AD in the Ebro Valley during the battle of Clavijo. He appeared to King Ramiro I in his sleep promising help. When the Christians were told what happened from then on the cry that would come from the throats of the Spaniards from both worlds would be SANTIAGO. Please join me in voicing this cry for the unjust treatment of our ancestors' history and the preservation of our Spanish culture.

In 1170 the Order of Santiago Knights was established which combined chivalry with the defense of Christendom. The Order became the largest and most prestigious order. Each member wore a scallop shell the symbol of a pilgrim. Membership in the Order of Santiago in the New World was the most cherished honor by many colonial governors.

In the New World the Order of Santiago appealed to the Indians and devotion to him rapidly spread among them. The Indians demonstrated an enthusiastic allegiance to his name and ceremonies. Taos Pueblo celebrates the feast of St. James on July 25th with a corn dance. Pueblos accept St. James as their Patron Saint can we do no less or are we going to look to another saint while they claim him as their own?

Santiago is also the protector of agriculture and ranching. He was frequently invoked to restore strayed or stolen animals.

Don Juan de Oñate's banner of white Castilian silk had Onate's coat of arms and a picture of Santiago astride his pawing charger. The supply party that followed the main expedition had a banner of red damask with gold fringe with the image of Saint James and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

One of the most significant apparitions in the New World was to the soldiers during the battle of Acoma. Our ancestors said they saw him in the sky and he was riding a white horse with his flaming sword as he came to their aid. This is also interesting since our ancestors also introduced the horse to the New World. Another sighting was in 1850 a Ute war party was thundering towards a small village in the San Luis Valley. Upon sighting the advancing danger the entire population of the defenseless village knelt to pray. The men were away working the fields. Suddenly the Indians turned and left. No one knew the reason until years later when peace was made with the Ute's, warriors stated they did not attack that day because they saw an armored knight on a white horse emerge from the dark clouds. None of the villagers had seen Santiago but now they realized he had defended them.

The military chapel on the Santa Fe Plaza originally had the image of Santiago in the central panel of the altar screen. A small wood carving of Santiago is preserved in Santuario de Chimayo and dates to the Colonial period.

"Santiago Saint of Two Worlds" co-authored by Marc Simmons is a book written about all of the attributes of this very special Apostle. I am sure you can think of many great saints but Santiago personifies our culture and ties to Spain more than any other Saint.

In James Mitchner's book "Iberia" the last chapter is written about Santiago. An account of the Pilgrims who humbled themselves to travel the Camino de Santiago includes the following:

813 King Alfonso II

1064 El Cid Campeador

1154 Louis VII of France

1214 Saint Francis of Assisi

1719 James III of Scotland and England

1939 Marshal Petain of France

1957 Giovanni Roncalli (Pope John XXIII)

We should join their ranks and acknowledge the power of this Saint as our ancestors have throughout out time.

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