

THE FEAST OF SS SIMON AND JUDE

Isaiah 28. 14-16

Ephesians 2. 19-22

John 15. 17-27

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Today the Church celebrates the feast day of the great saints, Simon and Jude. They share the same feast day as well as the same tomb. Their mortal remains rest in the great basilica of St Peter in Rome.

Both were Apostles, members of the original twelve men who were chosen by our Lord to exercise his own authority as priest, prophet and king. The fact that Jesus chose twelve Apostles is no mere accident, of course. Christ came to reconstitute Israel, and just as there were twelve tribes that initially constituted the people of Israel, so there would be twelve new apostolic tribes from which the universal Church, the new Israel, would grow.

The Christian Church today is the living legacy of the twelve Apostles. Our mission is an extension of their mission. Our faith is their faith.

The scriptures tell us little about Simon and Jude. Simon (and this is Simon the less, not Simon Peter) is remembered in the gospels by St Luke as a 'zealot'¹ and by Sts Matthew and Mark as a 'Canaanite' or 'Cananaean'.² If Simon was a zealot, this would mean that he was an insurrectionist, and that he was most likely a member of those groups which advocated a violent overthrow of Rome and its collaborators.

¹ C. Lk 6. 15.

² Cf. Mt 10. 4, Mk 3. 18.

Remember, during the life of our Lord, the lands of Israel were essentially occupied territory, controlled by the emperor of Rome and his legions.

However, the reference to Simon as a zealot may not be totally accurate. The description might simply mean that Simon was ‘zealous’, that is, that he was characterised by an ardent zeal for his Jewish identity, hence for God, for his people, and for the divine law.

Similarly, Jude (or Judas, not to be confused with Judas Iscariot) scarcely gets a mention in the gospels. He is called ‘Judas son of James’ by St Luke,³ while Sts Matthew and Mark simply call him Thaddeus.⁴

Only St John⁵ notes a request made by Thaddeus to our Lord during the Last Supper. The Apostle says to Jesus, ‘Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?’ It is a question of great present importance, one which we might also ask. Why has Christ not yet manifested himself in all his glory to those who oppose him, to show that he is the victor? Why did God manifest himself only to the disciples? Our Lord’s answer is mysterious and profound.

He says, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”⁶ This means that Jesus must be seen and perceived *with the heart*, with the result that God makes his dwelling in us. Christ does not appear to us as a visible ‘thing’. Our Lord wishes to enter into our lives and because of this, his manifestation is a manifestation that implies and presupposes an *open heart*. Only in this way do we ‘see’ him.

³ Cf. Lk 6. 16, Acts 1. 13.

⁴ Cf. Mt 10. 3, Mk 3. 18.

⁵ Cf. Jn 14. 22.

⁶ Cf. Jn 14. 23.

Some people believe that Jude Thaddaeus was also the author of the letter of Jude in the New Testament. The Epistle of Jude is a brief document addressed to the Church, and warns against corrupt influences that have crept in. It has some obscure and baffling references to old Jewish traditions, but it includes a memorable exhortation to ‘contend for the faith once delivered to the saints’, and an even more memorable closing: ‘Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding great joy, to the only wise God, or Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.’

In the various lists of the twelve Apostles given in the New Testament, the tenth and eleventh places are generally occupied by Simon and Jude. Some ancient Christian writers say that Simon and Jude travelled together, preaching and spreading the faith in the regions of Judea, Syria, Egypt and Libya; and legend has it that they undertook a mission to Persia, where they brought many people to the kingdom of God. But they encountered opposition and were murdered. Simon was sawed in half; and Jude was crucified and impaled with javelins.

The obscurity of Simon and Jude (and indeed of most of the twelve Apostles) is a significant lesson for us. To be a disciple is not an exercise in self-promotion. Holiness happens to us when we willingly disappear into the mission of the Church. Our work, our mission, is not about us, or what we want, or what we prefer; but about giving our lives over to Christ and letting him do with us what he wills.

When I speak of taking part in the mission of the Church, some of us will have various reactions. There may be some who will say, ‘I’m not interested’; or ‘That is not my gifting’. Others will say, ‘No one will take me seriously’. Or others might say, ‘My life doesn’t correlate to the lives of the saints. I’m sinful, broken, wounded

and rough on the edges'. These, and many other thoughts, may have deluded us into thinking that we cannot be used by God for the purposes of his kingdom.

But the fact is that God is looking for people who have entertained the same thoughts that I have just mentioned. All he wants from us is *open hearts*; hearts that will allow him to lead us. As we open our hearts, we will be surprised to see how he works in spite of us and through us; and how we are changed in the process.

The Apostles (including Sts Simon and Jude) proved themselves faithful by their willingness to live for Christ and disappear into the mission of the Church. We should imitate their example. It's a disappearing act that we should follow.

Amen.