

Sermon for The Feast of Sts. Simon and Jude – John 15:17-21
In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

St. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians that he was the least among the apostles. But not far behind him were Sts. Simon and Jude. Whereas St. Paul wrote more books in Sacred Scripture than any other human author and was essentially the lead role in the last 16 chapters in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we know next to nothing about Sts. Simon and Jude. These two relatively unknown apostles are always listed toward the bottom of the roster of our Lord's twelve. Holy Scripture tells us Simon and Jude were among the twelve, but little more than that. So what do we know about them? In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this Simon is distinguished from Simon Peter by being identified as "the Cananaean" or "the Zealot." Zealots were a political party within the Pharisees who awaited a messiah who would establish his kingdom by force. They also opposed paying taxes to the Roman government.

But slightly more is known about Jude. He is also called by the names "Thaddeus" and "Lebbaeus" to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot. He's also mentioned as a relative of a certain James (which was a common name back in that day). It is possible that this Jude wrote the short New Testament epistle which precedes the book of Revelation. In Roman Catholic lore, prayers would ascend to St. Jude in order to receive help in desperate cases or in times of last resort (I imagine the idea being, 'Well, we've tried all the other saints and received no answer, how about Saint Jude?'). Many hospitals around our country have the name St. Jude and there's even a thrift store called by his name over on North Oak.

Back in the Scriptures, Jude does have one line of dialogue with Christ in the Gospel of St. John when he asked: "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" It's an insightful question: Lord, how will You show Yourself to us, and yet the rest of the world will not see You? The answer to Jude's question would arrive on the day before a Passover when his Lord could be seen suspended from a cross outside Jerusalem. To the world, this was the last moments of a failed religious activist. It was an event to be overlooked. It was an event to be forgotten. But to the disciples of Christ, God was manifesting Himself as the Supreme Conqueror of the world, sin, and death. To the world, water being poured over the head of an infant by a man wearing funny clothes-- is something to be overlooked. But to those who see through faith, God reveals again His victory over sin, death, and the devil in the life of men. The world sees a small circle of bread and a sip of wine given out. But the eyes of faith see full redemption and pardon for sinners in the Body and Blood of Christ.

The Gospel that has come to be associated with the Feast of our two little-known apostles, Simon and Jude, is written in the Gospel of St. John, chapter 15. But our Lord's words in this Scripture are so general that they could be applied not only to Simon and Jude, but really to any apostle, and quite frankly to any disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the past, present, or future: "These things I command you, so that you will love one another. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me."

This Gospel is about Simon and Jude for sure. The world hated them. They were not of the world, so the world would not love them. The legend says that they preached the Gospel in Persia

where they brought many people into the Kingdom of God. But some people despised this Gospel and murdered them. Simon was sawn in half, but His steadfast confession in Christ could not be rent asunder. Jude was crucified and impaled with javelins, but his trust in the Lord remained undefiled. And so it is that the world hates those who carry the Gospel, that perfect Love, the fruit of that good Sacrifice, even today. For even now, we carry the love of God not just for ourselves, but also for the life of the world. Being a Christian doesn't mean being right with God privately and secretly. It's being eager to divulge the mystery of Great News in God's love for man in Christ Jesus. And thus the world hates Christians who bear this Good News, who seek to change the world by offering it Life, even as it hated Christ. We are the sheep. The hateful world is the wolves. The life of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, is lived out in His disciples. The Mission continues. The Word spreads. The martyrs are put to death.

Thus Sts. Simon and Jude, the other apostles, and martyrs were sent by Jesus Christ to proclaim the Good News of God's Love to a killing world embroiled in self-absorption and in hate. But in that suffering, through that torture and sorrow, beyond that persecution, they found perfect joy and peace. If I could add another paradox to Pr. Arnold's excellent list last week, it would be this: suffering with Christ is always joined to peace with Christ. What Simon and Jude preached was also for them. Jesus paid also for their sins. He washed them clean. He made them His. His mercy birthed them anew to a living hope through His resurrection and made them heirs by Grace to an inheritance which is imperishable, to an inheritance which is undefiled, to an inheritance which is unfading. Though they knew difficulty and hatred on this earth, they knew even better that it would not last, that there is for those who trust in Christ a salvation to be revealed in the last time. Tested by fire, their faith was refined, strengthened by power from on high, drawn closer to it and made perfect. In life, in death, Christ was their all.

And so it is still today. The Mission continues. The Word spreads. The martyrs are put to death. Confessors are mocked and ridiculed. The world drives on in its course of blind lust and hatred of the Truth, with its vain worship of self and success. And some martyrs bleed on the inside. Their reputations are destroyed. Their names are slandered and betrayed. They die a thousand deaths as former friends, allies, and companions turn their backs in self-preservation for a glimmering lie of worldly honor and acceptance, for popularity and success.

What comfort, then, is there for modern martyrs, these quiet men of conviction and truth, even you in your hostile workplaces, neighborhoods, and homes? Just this: it will not last. Beyond the persecution and the suffering, after the shallow mocking, then shall the salvation and the honor and the glory be revealed. And what's more: you belong to a long line of noble saints, including Apostles and Prophets, housewives and husbands-- not well-known, but God chose you out of the world. And He will not let you go. He keeps you close to Himself through this suffering and perfects your faith through it. For you, by Grace, in Mercy, for Christ's sake, are God's own, His beloved, His baptized! Being hated by men is better than being loved by the devil any day.

Sts. Simon and Jude gave their lives in the service of Christ. The little-known apostles died in a foreign land so that foreign people like us might know Jesus. They did not love their lives unto death. And now they have their reward. For blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. The angels will sing this also of you. In the meantime, just as Simon and Jude did, continue to receive the forgiveness of sins that will sustain, strengthen, and comfort you. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen. ✠BJF✠