

ST. SIMON & ST JUDE – OCTOBER 28TH 2020

So, what does the Gospel tell us this morning? It's seven paragraphs relating how Jesus went to the hills to pray to God, seeking His advice on whom He should choose as leaders amongst His disciples. After an all-night vigil He called everyone together and chose 12 men.

Amongst them were St Simon and St Jude, the two men we honour today. But, just who were these two men? In the list that St. Luke gives us Simon and Jude are mentioned just as names and nothing more. But, after Simon's name is added a significant word, "zealot."

In Jesus' day the word "zealot" was the title a man took when he became a member of the Nationalist Party. This was a party founded by Judas the Galilean and was a revival of the old Maccabean movement. It was a political party in the sense that it resisted all foreign rule, forming themselves into guerrilla bands against the Roman army of occupation in Palestine.

That was the political aspect of the party. But, it was also a religious movement. The Zealots were ever keener than the Pharisees for the strict observance of the Law of Moses. It could be said that they were passionately devoted to liberty, though of a very narrow kind.

Simon the Nationalist, then, became a follower of Jesus Christ, and we can see quite clearly the steps he took. Because of his political and religious background he saw in Christ a great leader and a political power. But, as he followed our Lord more closely he came to see in Him not only these virtues, but also the incarnate God.

Inspired by a vision of the kingdom in terms of Jewish Nationalism, Simon was led to see that kingdom without barriers or boundaries, and liberty as wide as the world.

There is a tradition that he died a martyr's death in Persia, the modern Iran. We could say that the name of Simon is not without significance today for people in countries which, like the Zealots of Simon's time, are also being betrayed by false nationalism.

The Greeks and Copts have a tradition that Simon was the bridegroom at the marriage feast at Cana, where our Lord performed His first public miracle. Nothing is known for certain where St. Simon preached the Gospel or where he died. He is the patron saint of woodcutters and tanners.

Bracketed with St. Simon is St. Jude. Luke describes him as the brother of James, but the Greek word is not too clear and more probably the text should read as "son of James." Jude is the author of the last canonical epistle of which the theologian, Origen said "contained strong doctrine in a few lines." Jude tells us: Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto life everlasting."

St. Jude, whose surname is Thaddaeus, is also called Judas, “not Iscariot,” so as not to confuse him with the Judas who led the Temple guard to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

There is a tradition that Jude preached the faith in Palestine, but later went to Persia and Armenia, where he was martyred. He is the patron saint of hospitals and is appealed to in cases of severe illness.

The only incident we read in the Gospels in which St Jude is mentioned is when he asked Christ at the Last Supper: “Lord, what is come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us, and not unto the world?” He couldn’t understand how the kingdom could come without Jesus making a public disclosure of His glory.

He was puzzled when Jesus said that it was impossible for the kingdom to come to unloving and disobedient hearts. Like Simon, Jude thought of the kingdom in terms of a national state and not in terms of a worldwide community.

These two men stand together in the Church Calendar because their gifts are complementary: liberty and loyalty. True liberty is only to be found in loyalty to Christ “who is the author of peace and lover of concord, in whom standeth our eternal life, and whose service is perfect freedom.”

The promise that Jesus made to Simon and Jude in Galilee, still stands for us today. “Come unto Me, all ye that are heavy laden and I will refresh you.” There is the promise. There is the assurance. There is the offer, available to us all just as it was when Simon and Jude first followed Jesus Christ.