

ST. SIMON AND ST. JUDE, APOSTLES
Jude 1:1-4,17-23, John 14:21-27

The Augsburg Confession to which all of you confirmed have pledged yourselves provides three reasons for commemorating, or remembering, the saints of old. We read:

Our Confession approves honoring the saints in three ways. The first is thanksgiving. We should thank God because He has shown examples of mercy, because He wishes to save people, and because He has given teachers and other gifts to the Church... The second service is the strengthening of our faith. When we see Peter's denial forgiven, we also are encouraged to believe all the more that grace truly superabounds over sin. The third honor is the imitation, first of faith, then of other virtues. Everyone should imitate the saints according to his calling.

The writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 13, *"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* And so today, since the commemoration of St. Simon and St. Jude, Apostles falls on this date, I've decided to use the readings appointed in our lectionary to celebrate the commemoration, which is, by definition, to point us to Christ.

Interestingly, whenever the twelve Apostles are listed, St. Simon and St. Jude are tenth and eleventh on the list. They are rather inconspicuous Apostles, about whom little is known, whose service, however, was just as valuable as that of any of the other Apostles, whose preaching and teaching served the same end as all the rest, bring lost souls to the crucified Savior through whose resurrection the dead find life.

St. Simon is the Apostle known in the Gospels as "Simon the Zealot." Unless this is a reference to his personality, that is, that he was rather high-strung, it is likely that, before being called by Christ, Simon had belong to the political movement in Israel nicknamed "the Zealots" for their zeal and desire to see the Jews liberated from Roman oppression. A few decades after Jesus' death, this group overran Jerusalem in an attempt to overthrow the Roman government and, by their rebellion, ushered in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Obviously, any connections Simon may have had with this group were severed when he became an Apostle, for there was no room in Jesus' Church for those who would confuse the roles of Church and State and try to turn the Messiah's coming into a cause for violence. What a marvelous twist of fate it must have been for Simon, so eager for freedom, in the case of the Zealots, freedom from the Romans, to find real freedom in Jesus, freedom from sin, death and the devil, freedom to live, not for himself, but for Christ!

The Gospels do not tell us much about St. Simon besides his name and that he was a Zealot. He is listed among the Apostles in the Gospels and then again in the Book of Acts, and that is all. It would seem that St. Simon simply and faithfully served the Lord and the Church in the way and in the places in which God set him without attracting much attention. And how many similar men and women haven't there been throughout the ages serving without accolades or awards, but joyfully nonetheless, knowing that work for the Lord and for the benefit of our neighbor is never in vain and is always useful, whether preaching and teaching, or working the line and changing a diaper.

I would love to say that we know a lot more about St. Jude, but I'm afraid that just isn't the case. St. Jude's full name was indeed Judas. Understandably, however, after Maundy Thursday

and Judas Iscariot's betrayal, an effort was made to distinguish him from the traitor, and so we today know him, not as St. Judas, but as St. Jude. The only mention we find of him in the Gospels, besides in the lists of the Apostles, is found in John 14, our Holy Gospel today, where Jude asks Jesus, *"Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world."* Jesus answered Him, *"If anyone loves me, He will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words."* It is little wonder, therefore, that when Jude wrote his sole epistle in the New Testament, he wrote to urge his fellow Christians to hold fast to the words of Christ and to build one another up in them, as they lived their Christian lives in a world hostile to their message and lifestyle.

Historically, St. Simon's symbol is a fish resting on a book. He was a fisher of men, preaching the gospel, recorded for us in Holy Scripture. St. Jude's symbol is a ship. He took the gospel to the world, like Simon, fishing for men, rescuing them from hell and pulling them through the waters of Holy Baptism into the holy ark of the Church. The color for their commemoration is the same color used for the commemoration of all the other Apostles: red. Red is the color of blood. History tells us they were martyrs, put to death for the Faith, testifying by their willingness to die rather than deny their Lord to the precious and incomparable treasure we Christians have in eternal life.

All the Apostles, except one, died for their faith. The other Apostle, the other Judas, whose symbol, as a testimony to his apostasy, is always blank, died for his lack of faith, refusing to believe that Christ, who is faithfully and willing to forgive when we confess our sins, would forgive him for his betrayal. In the two Judases, in Jude and Judas Iscariot, we receive a very real and personal reminder of the significance of Jesus words, *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven,"* (Matthew 10:32,33). There is no in between when it comes to Jesus. We are His and He is ours or we are not His and He is not ours. It is one way or the other.

Today we commemorate St. Simon and St. Jude. We know little about them, but we do know a few things for sure. They were sinners. They were called to God's mercy by Christ and followed Him. They took that mercy to others, and then continued to build those who believed up in that mercy. They held to the Faith as their greatest treasure and at all costs, even when it cost them their lives. And their service went, for the most part, without accolades or attention. They were unassuming men, serving simply and faithfully in the place and in the way God had sent them, not for thanks and praise, but in thanks and praise to their Master who had brought them from that first day He called them to the waters of His Baptism in the Jordan, to the cross of His death on Calvary, and to the empty tomb of His resurrection in the Garden.

Repenting of the impure motives of the past or a selfish desire for accolades and attention, let us serve just as simply and faithfully in the place and in the way God has set us, and with the same motivation, rooted in the saving work of Christ on our behalf. Nothing you do for the Lord is insignificant. Nothing you do for your neighbor is unimportant. It is what the Lord has prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10), and it is His joy and delight. If the Lord thought it wasn't worth doing, He wouldn't have plopped you where He did. You may be the simple and unassuming saint, but you are a saint nonetheless, in the place and in the way God

has set you. Hold to the Faith that has made you so, for it is your greatest treasure and there is nothing in this world worth trading it for.

Why don't we go ahead and do something a little different today. Let's join together in speaking to one another the greatest testament these Apostles have left us: words pointing us to Christ and encouraging us in Him. Let's read together again the second lesson, printed in your worship folder, and may God make these words our own, and may He preserve them and all His words handed down to us through the prophets and Apostles until His coming again, among us and for the benefit of many others.