

SAINTS SIMON AND JUDE¹

A sermon preached by Associate Professor Michael Horsburgh AM in St James' Church, King Street, Sydney, at Choral Evensong on the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, 27 October 2019

This homily is really a dry run for next Sunday when we celebrate the Feast of All Saints. I'm the preacher and I'm practicing today on two saints before I must face the great cloud of witnesses next Sunday. Simon and Jude are described as "apostles and martyrs", so they must be important, even if we don't know much about them. Each of the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke gives a list of the twelve apostles.²

They agree on ten of the names. Of the other two, we have three mentions of a Simon, variously called the Cananaean or the Zealot, two mentions of a Thaddaeus and one mention of a Judas, son of James. Everyone assumes that these references are to today's saints, that is, Thaddeus and Judas are the same person. We don't know whether these two names were alternatives or joined, that is, the apostle could have been called "Judas Thaddeus". In addition, John's gospel refers to a Jude with the qualification "(not Iscariot)".³ Finally, nobody thinks that our Jude is the author of the New Testament book bearing that name. We should also note that "Jude" is an alternative version of "Judas".

Simon the Zealot also appears at the beginning of Acts,⁴ mentioned by name in the group of Apostles, along with Judas, son of James, but he has no recorded words. Judas, however, is recorded in John as asking Jesus a question, as we heard in our second reading:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered him, '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.'⁵

Both these apostles are said to have been martyrs but we actually know nothing about them, except the scanty references to them in the gospels. Tradition says that they preached the gospel in Persia and were martyred there together. Simon is said to have been sawed in half and some representations of him have him carrying a saw. St Jude is said to have died by the sword or spear or possibly crucified.

In my academic life, I was occasionally asked to provide a formal reference for a former student taking up an office or joining a learned society. The operative part of my reference was usually that I knew the person to be of "good character and reputation". You will be aware of the difference between these two terms. "Character" relates to your actual virtue or lack of it. "Reputation" relates to how others see you. Thus, my declarations could be open to three different errors. The person could have neither a good character nor a good reputation. In which case, I should not give a reference, since I should know, at least, the person's reputation. The second error is that the person might have a good character, despite having a bad reputation. In which case, the person would not get my certification, even though they probably

¹ Readings: (RCL) Psalm 116; 1 Maccabees 2:42-66, John 14:15-26. (BCP) Psalm 136; Jude 1; John 15: 17-27

² Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 3:13-16

³ John 14:22

⁴ Acts 1:13

⁵ John 14:22-24

deserved it. This person is in the same situation as the psalmist outlines in the anthem⁶ that we have just heard:

... in the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.
I looked also upon my right hand: and saw there was no man that would know me.
I had no place to flee unto: and no man cared for my soul.⁷

The most dangerous error is that the person, while having a good reputation, is of bad character. In that case, my mistake might be an unwitting one. We don't need to think too far to realise that this is the situation many of us experienced when persons of high standing were ultimately shown to be corrupt or to have committed serious offences such as child sexual abuse. The week before last, for example, the former Dean of Newcastle, Graeme Lawrence, was sentenced to prison for child sex offences. I had always held him in high regard and he had, on a number of occasions, stood in this pulpit. It would be devastating to discover that one had made such a mistake and possibly helped to perpetuate offensive behaviours. But, as far as I know, I never made any of those errors.

One of those situations is relevant to one of today's saints. We should pity poor St Jude. He has acquired a bad reputation by association. You may know that he is regarded as the patron saint of desperate cases and lost causes. Why?

You will remember that John's gospel records him as "Judas (not Iscariot)". The pious would not have consciously prayed to a person with both bad character and bad reputation. Judas Iscariot certainly falls into that category. It would seem unlikely that anyone would invoke his prayers on their behalf, even by accident. It is the possibility of accident that affected St Jude. Everyone else was invoked before him. Only when the cause seemed desperate or lost, would the pious turn to him.

St Simon, by contrast, is associated with curriers and tanners, that is, those who work in the leather industry. I have no idea why this industry was chosen. He has, however, a third patronage, that of sawyers, a dark reference to his alleged manner of death.

What are we to make of all this? We might remind ourselves how little we know of the lives and experiences of those who were close to Jesus; how little we know of how his closest circle worked and what dangers its members faced. Given the rapid spread of Christianity around the ancient world, many people must have been active. The spread cannot be attributed to only the few well known people. We need to have great respect for those who, unknown to us, were the first actors in our Christian heritage.

St Simon and St Jude, we thank you and we honour you.

⁶ Thomas Saunders Dupuis (1733-1796), "I cried unto the Lord with my voice"

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Sanders_Dupuis

⁷ Psalm 142:3b-5



St Jude—St John Lateran, Rome

Prayer to St Jude

O most holy apostle, Saint Jude, faithful servant and friend of Jesus, the Church honoureth and invoceth thee universally, as the patron of hopeless cases, and of things almost despaired of.

Pray for me, who am so miserable. Make use, I implore thee, of that particular privilege accorded to thee, to bring visible and speedy help where help was almost despaired of.

Come to mine assistance in this great need, that I may receive the consolation and succor of Heaven in all my necessities, tribulations, and sufferings, particularly (here make your request) and that I may praise God with thee and all the elect throughout eternity.

I promise thee, O blessed Jude, to be ever mindful of this great favour, to always honour thee as my special and powerful patron, and to gratefully encourage devotion to thee.

Amen.



St Simon the Zealot—St John Lateran, Rome



*Prayer to Saint Simon
the Apostle*

O Glorious Saint Simon, you were a cousin of Jesus and a devoted follower as well. You were called "the Zealot," indicating that you were willing to give your life for your religion and your freedom as a human person. Obtain for us the grace to be willing to give our lives for Christ and to labor for the freedom and peace that only God can give. Help us to spend ourselves for God on earth and be received by Him in eternal bliss in Heaven. Amen.

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