

Sermon for 28.10.18. The Feast of St Simon and St Jude Apostles and Martyrs.  
Deuteronomy 32.1-4; Ps 19. 1-6; Jude 1-3, 17-25; Luke 6.12-16

*Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. (Luke 6.12)* In Luke's gospel, more than in Mark and Matthew we learn that prayer is the foundation of Jesus ministry. Prayer is what empowers him in all he does. Before every significant action in his ministry, Luke shows Jesus departing to pray.

Emanating from his prayer time with the Father, Jesus' mature decision making, his daily life activity, his metered response to all situations and his strength and courage to carry out his mission flows out into the community he serves.

In our gospel story today when Jesus returned from his prayer time up the mountain, he called all the disciples together and from the group - and there were many who followed him, - he designated twelve as apostles. Now for the remainder of the gospel, Luke uniquely distinguishes between the words "apostle" and "disciple", although both words are often applied to the same person.

Alexander Sharia writes about the difference in Luke's gospel, *"When "apostle" is used, it means "one who is sent out". "Disciple", however, is always applied in the context of "learner" and is always used when Jesus is teaching. The lesson Luke wishes to give to the emerging Christian communities is clear; the opportunity for apostleship comes with maturity, and yet discipleship – even for apostles – never ends. The spiritual journey will always require "continuing education" in how to offer wisdom appropriately and with compassion"*<sup>1</sup>.

Today we celebrate the lives of the apostles and martyrs Simon the Zealot and Jude son of James. In the lists of the Twelve Apostles in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Simon the Zealot and Jude were the tenth and eleventh apostles named.

Some ancient Christian writers say that Simon and Jude both went together as missionaries to Persia, and were martyred there. If this is true, it explains, to some extent, our lack of historical information on them both. Simon is not mentioned by name in the New Testament except on the lists of the apostles. We believe that he was a Zealot – a passionate Jew who refused to recognise any foreign power over Palestine.

It is interesting to imagine how he got along with Matthew the tax collector. Their political beliefs were poles apart. Matthew collected taxes from his own people for the enemy – the Romans - and lined his own pockets with the excess taxes that he was allowed to overcharge. From Simon's perspective Matthew would have been the worst of the worst – collecting money for the Romans as well as taking advantage of his people for his own gain. I can imagine that Simon would have detested the work Matthew had been involved in.

The fact that Jesus called them both to belong to the twelve apostles who would become his close friends and witnesses, testifies to the reality that Jesus can bring all things and people together in oneness with his healing power - even those with deep seated differences.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander J. Shaia. The Hidden Power of the Gospels, HarperOne, New York; 2010

Simon the Zealot is the patron Saint of: carriers; saw men; sawyers; tanners.

Our second reading today is from the Epistle of Jude. Contemporary theological scholarship believes, however, that the author of the letter is not the "apostle" Jude. Scholars judge this to be a letter written under an assumed or fictitious name for several reasons; firstly the late date of the letter, secondly, the excellent Greek style not thought possible for a Jewish follower of Jesus and thirdly, the fact that attributing the authorship of a writing to a major figure is well attested in the bible and in other ancient literature.

The purpose of the Epistle is to encourage the addressees to contend for the faith against those who pervert the grace of God. The letter contains beautiful guidelines that serve us well today :*"but you beloved build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, and look forward to the mercy of our lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life"*. Jude 1.17-21. The fact that the author chose Jude as the pseudonym, most likely suggests that the Epistle reflects Jude's own courageous faith beliefs.

After the Last Supper it was Jude who asked Jesus why he chose to reveal Himself only to the apostles. He received the reply: "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." (John 14:22f)

Jude is often, in popular usage, referred to as the patron of desperate causes, the "saint of last resort" - the one you ask for help when all else fails.

We may wonder why this is so. One explanation that I found said that since his name reminds hearers of Judas Iscariot, there is a tendency for someone asking a Christian brother or sister for intercessory prayers, to try one of the other apostles first. Hence, Jude has come to be called "the saint of last resort," the one whom you ask only when desperate.

In 1605, the relics of the two Apostles Simon and Jude were transported to the Vatican Basilica and placed in a crypt under the Altar of the Crucifixion. There, their remains lie together in death as they were in life.

I'd like to finish now with the Epistle of Jude's memorial closing – those beautiful words that we are invited to hold in our hearts and take into the days and weeks ahead:

*Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our saviour, through Jesus Christ our lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.*

The Lord be with you.