



Reflection for October 28, 2020

Saint Simon and St. Jude

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 Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

[Letter of Jude, vv. 24-25]

We do not know much about Simon or Jude. They are named only briefly in the lists of the apostles. (Jude is listed by the variant Judas, different from Judas Iscariot.) According to tradition they were missionaries together in Persia. Simon is called “the Zealot,” suggesting that he was a political activist (not necessarily a radical) and an advocate for Jewish Law in the early days of the formation of

Christianity. Jude is referred to as the younger brother of James of Jerusalem and of Jesus; he has long been called “the patron saint of lost causes” or “the hope of the hopeless”, but that tradition is of unknown origin.

Obscurity also surrounds the Letter of Jude, placed just before the Book of Revelation. We know little about the time of its writing or its audience. Like the Letters to the Christians in Corinth, its theme is that the freedom given by faith is fundamentally different from the social freedoms that may be rooted in personal whim and disregard for social boundaries. The resurrection did not free us from social responsibilities, the Letter teaches; rather, it provides a moral compass that frees us to be compassionate and confident in God’s guidance—hence the conclusion of the Letter, quoted above. The lure of the faithless is not power but self-centeredness, and it is described in striking imagery from nature that captures both its beauty and its danger: *They are like jagged rocks just below the surface of the water waiting to snag you when they join your love feasts. They feast with you without reverence. They care only for themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; fruitless autumn trees, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom the darkness of the underworld is reserved forever.* (Jude, vv. 12-13)

It is because this irreverence and recklessness is so easily mistaken for freedom that compassion, not judgement, is the foundation for faithful living: *But you, dear friends: build each other up on the foundation of your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep each other in the love of God, wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will give you eternal life. Have mercy on those who doubt. Save some by snatching them from the fire.* (Jude, vv.20-23)

It sometimes difficult, especially in these days, to tell the difference between the inevitable changes in nature and the disruptions caused by human negligence. It is not always easy to know when we are “going with the flow” and when we have become “waterless clouds” or “wandering stars.” It is sometimes easier to exclude people whose views we fear or disdain than to “build each other up on the foundation of our most holy faith.” The Letter of Jude calls us to a remarkable and tender vigilance while we “snatch some from the fire” of their own fear and folly. We are both humbled and empowered by the gift and guidance of faith in one God, ever-present, ever merciful.