

Monday 28 October 2024

Saints Simon and Jude



Sermon © Revd Dr Paul Monk.

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The Collect for Saints Simon and Jude

Almighty God,
who built your Church upon the foundation
of the apostles and prophets,
with Jesus Christ himself as the chief corner-stone:
so join us together in unity of spirit by their doctrine,
that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah

Hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through it will not come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have taken shelter'; therefore thus says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'One who trusts will not panic.'

Isaiah 28:14-16

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. *Ephesians 2:19-22*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

All **Glory to you O Lord.**

Jesus said to his disciples, 'I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.

'Remember the word that I said to you, "Servants are not greater than their master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not have sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It was to fulfil the word that is written in their law, "They hated me without a cause."

'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.' *John 15:17-27*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All **Praise to you O Christ.**

Sermon

It is common to hear Saint Jude described as the patron saint of lost causes. This meditation is sponsored by that idea, of lost causes.

We may hear a lost cause described with the phrase like, 'he or she hasn't a prayer!' The context means a person has tried everything and nothing works. They've tried the more straightforward things like seeking advice from agencies and help from friends. Nothing works. Nothing is left, so they pray. They pray even though 'everyone knows' that asking God in a prayer never works. Asking the Saints for help never works—the cause is now lost They haven't a prayer.

The prayers of those who live in this mindset become ever more detailed as they become ever more desperate. They berate an omnipotent God (Lord of heaven and

earth) with excessive detail: 'Lord, we pray for Mrs ABC who has an operation on her big toe of her left foot in Ward 3 of the Hospital next Tuesday at 2:15 pm. Her daughter XYZ is very worried ...' and so on for 10 minutes. Their prayer life dies of wordiness and, because it's based on such a misconception, grows to become faith-coloured atheism. They don't even believe it themselves. They haven't a prayer.

A great many prayers are not answered because they are not in fact prayers. They're the equivalent to sitting in a fridge and complaining it doesn't move like a Ferrari. It's not God's fault when He doesn't answer our petulant demands because praying is not about asking (or telling) God what to do. None of the following will work: telling God what to do. Bullying God. Pleading and bargaining. Sounding humble ('Lord, I'm just asking ...'). Giving God ever more detail in our instructions. These ways of looking at prayer are very common. But these 'prayers' are in fact talking—aloud or silently—to an invisible misconception. They haven't a prayer.

God has made each human soul in such a way that it needs Him, like a lock needs a key if it is to open. Some souls know they need God but others merely suspect they're missing something vital in their lives. They then fill the gap with activity, substances, gadgets, noise, etc. They may fill the gap with things that look like faith.

St Paul in today's second reading says we were like, 'strangers and aliens' before we met God. The main purpose of prayer is to facilitate such an encounter. The main goal of prayer is 'relationship' with God—*really* knowing Him. That's what St Paul means by, 'citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God'.

The intermediary who acts as a mobile phone in any long-distance conversation with God is the Holy Spirit. He enables our prayer, so we must become spiritual people if our prayer is to develop. Prayer develops in proportion that we are willing to be filled with the Spirit. A sure sign that we are becoming these spiritual people is that our prayers move from asking for things and become more a matter of promising God that we want to give. And the main thing we give is ourselves.

We acquire many of the characteristics of God if we give ourselves to Him and truly get to know Him. He asks us to share in His work of wholeness and making the world better. He invites us to 'participate in the divine nature' ([2 Peter 1:4](#)). He allows His power to flow through us to do so. *And that is what true prayer is about.*

We realise that true prayer is not telling God how to use His divine power. It turns out that true prayer is the opposite of what commonly pretends to be prayer. Ironically, we genuinely haven't got a prayer precisely because it's God's, not ours.