

Homily: Oct. 27, 2023

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As we celebrate the apostles Simon and Jude, we commemorate the patron saints of our Cathedral in Phoenix. We also celebrate the religious name's day of our confrer, Jude, whose namesake is the patron for hopeless cases. Legend has it that King Abgar V in Edessa (now southwest Turkey) was seriously and hopelessly ill and sent a letter to Jesus for help. Jesus delegated Jude along with a cloth that had Jesus' image on it. Hence, we often see paintings of Jude holding an image of Jesus. But more notable is the tongue of fire on top of Jude's head, symbolizing that he participated in the original Pentecost. Then I wonder, why don't we depict all the apostles with the flame of the holy spirit hovering over their head?

Most important is St. Jude's and the apostles' discipleship with Jesus, and their subsequent evangelizing.

As for Simon, we know nothing more in the scripture except his name in the list depicted in our Gospel today. Many people, such as Simon did marvelous work with and for Jesus, and suffered martyrdom for his work. Several traditions say he was sawed in half. He is often depicted with long saw in his hand. God knows and continues to create fruit from their labors done out of true love for God and according to God's will.

This feast of Judas and Simon is a reminder about the basis of our mission as disciples and evangelizers of Jesus. Jesus is the cornerstone—of the church, as well as the mission we undertake. The Risen Jesus told his apostles in one of his appearances, "Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you." St. Cyril of Alexandria captures two major reasons mentioned by Jesus as to how he understands being sent by the Father. "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." In another moment, Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. For God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him." Two days ago, we heard Jesus say, "I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing." This is the purifying fire of God's passionate love, which we all hope will overcome the fires of war and hatred.

Yes, these purposes for being sent, were meant not just for the first apostles, but all those afterwards—all those like you and me.

What does it mean for you and me to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance? We realize everyone needs to grow as a disciple of Jesus. However, God's main focus is on sinners who are clearly going in another direction than to God. Our heart goes to our sisters and brothers needing to turn back to the God of love, just as we also do.

What does it mean for you and me to save the world rather than condemn it? Simple condemnation saves no one. It may scare some. However, we are not helpful to people if all we say, "You're going to hell!" Rather, we may consider a conversation about poor choices made, which will indeed make the person's life a living hell, if he or she continues on an unhealthy and unloving way of life? We take Jesus' stance of deep felt mercy.

I propose we do some reflection today about how we can be disciples sent like the Son of God—sent for sinners, sent not to condemn, and sent to set the earth on fire.

I close with this farewell message of Apostle Jude, verse 20 of his letter:

"My dear friends, use your most holy faith as your foundation and build on that, praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves within the love of God and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you eternal life."