

SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Apostles (October 28)¹

Lessons:²

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the ninth Verse of the twenty-eighth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.³

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little: For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

“Wherefore hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem. Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith [SETH] the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the eleventh Verse of the second Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians.⁴

“... Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the

world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Homily:

We know very little about the two saints honored on this day, except that they were Apostles, and Simon had been some sort of Zealot before he followed Christ, while this Jude, or Judas, was not Iscariot. They traveled together, in later years, into Persia, we are told.

The observance of the feast of *Saint Simon and Saint Jude, Apostles*, provides an opportunity to look at how the Church *continues* the Apostolic ministry in every age, and will continue the Apostolic ministry until the Last Day when Christ will return and raise the dead. That is what these readings tell us, and what the Collect draws our attention to. Until 1928, and only here in the United States, the Epistle for this day was not from Ephesians, but rather the first eight verses of the Epistle of Jude where we find these famous words, “*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*”

The Collect for today, however, always drew from the words in Ephesians, “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.*” It is good to think upon both of these passages of Scripture in light of the Gospel portion we have heard, with

particular attention to these words: “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.*”

We need to think about all of these words, because St. Paul, St. Jude brother of St. James, and our Lord Jesus Christ have described the life we are living here and now in this world. It is a life of enmity from the world, for we do not belong to this world, but also life empowered by the Holy Spirit. We do not need to belong to this world, because we are part of something better, with a foundation that is, even though quite ancient, always new. Only those who are baptized into Christ’s death and raised to walk in newness of life can be the living stones that make up this, the temple of the Lord, “*an habitation of God through the Spirit.*” Because the world hates us, all the wrath of the world, the flesh and the Devil force us to contend for the Faith once delivered to the saints; we are given no period of rest from the war unless and until we are granted to sleep before the dead in Christ rise first, on the Last Day.

A Biblical word not found in today’s readings, but relevant to them, is the word, “*tribulation.*” Some of our Evangelical friends believe in a fairly recently-concocted theory of Biblical interpretation, that they will be, as they say, “raptured away”, and the world will suffer “the Great Tribulation.” This theory has never made sense to me, because what the world suffers cannot be called tribulation—wrath, yes, not tribulation; tribulation is the fiery trial of our faith, more precious than gold.

In fact, the symbolic period of three and a half years, or “a time, times and half a time” or “forty-two months”, comes from the Book of Numbers, and the forty-two encampments of Israel before they entered the Land of Promise; and as such symbolizes the entire time that the Church has been and will remain in this world. It does not symbolize

some special period near the end, certainly not some period without the Church.

Those who think they may be spared tribulation as a reward for their faith are living in an ungodly fantasy. In many other countries of the real world, Christians live with persecution, sometimes to the death; indeed, it is our comfort in the West that is the exception to the rule. One Coptic man told me, in early 2005, that he and his father were in America with refugee status because, “in Egypt,” he told me, “the mass killing of Christians goes on all the time.”

Try telling those persecuted Christians that American Evangelicals will be spared tribulation because of their faith, and see how sane they think you are. “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you,*” said our Lord Jesus. And so, it does. To have the Faith at all requires that we earnestly contend for the Faith, that same Faith that was once delivered to the saints.

Our foundation is the truth of salvation that has been revealed by God. To be built upon the Apostles and Prophets rightly makes us think of the Scriptures, and speaks of Antiquity. The first man called a prophet (נָבִיא , *nabiy'*) is our father, Abraham.⁵ The foundation upon which we are built goes back through the people of Israel to that nomadic patriarch, and the revelation given to him, and his faith by which all of us who are in Christ are his children and heirs.

The revelation of God through all the prophets, from Moses to the later prophets of Scripture, all points to one Man Who would come, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostles continued the work through the same Holy Ghost who spake by the prophets. Their words also point to one Man, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostles could speak of the same mysteries with the veil taken away. The Virgin foretold by Isaiah *had* conceived and borne a son, who is Immanuel, God Incarnate with us even now by His Spirit. The soul of the Suffering Servant, foretold as well, had already been made a

sacrifice for sin, and He had already risen to prolong His days, so that the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

The New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah, that mysterious New Covenant in which the Law is written on our hearts and our sins forgiven, had been established in His blood, as He revealed in the night in which He was betrayed. So the Apostles completed the foundation, Christ Himself the chief cornerstone; and no other foundation, says St. Paul, can any man lay. The foundation is the revelation of God fulfilled in Christ, revelation about Him, and a temple of living stones—you and me—built on Him.

We Anglicans say much about Apostolic Succession, as we ought. Our bishops trace their Apostolic Succession back to those same men to whom the risen Christ personally, in His resurrected and glorious body of flesh and bone, gave the charge when He breathed on them the Holy Spirit, and sent them into the world. And their only strength against the enmity of the world was the power of that same Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit who supplies all things needed by the Church for her to be truly Apostolic. For the Church is not merely in its origins Apostolic; it is in its life Apostolic, in its power Apostolic, and in the proclamation of the Gospel committed to her, the Church is Apostolic in calling all men everywhere to repent. We are built on that foundation, and on no other, *“for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”*

As St. John wrote, in the opening of his first Epistle:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

The Christ with whom we have fellowship, is the same Christ whose Incarnation touches us even now in the sacramental life within the fellowship passed on through all generations of the Church. The Man Who they saw and heard, and who they touched with their hands, who lived, died and lives again evermore, is present with us. The foundation is not some ideal to read about, but a living reality here and now.

We can approach our mission as Catholic Christians in the Anglican tradition in one of two ways. One way is to see Apostolic Succession as merely historical; the other is to see it as present, with Apostolic ministry continuing here and now. The gifts of grace that God still gives to the whole Church through our bishops, are not mere formalities; they are the means whereby we realize the words we have heard today: *“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.”*

We had a choice to make, both as a church body and as individuals who have entered it: We could be among those St. Paul spoke of as *“having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”*, about whom he directed us, *“from such turn away”*,⁶ or we could *“earnestly contend for the Faith once delivered to the saints.”* And, however rough the ride may have been at times, or will be, it is well worth it. We are built on Christ’s own foundation; we are *“an holy temple in the Lord... builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”* This gives us the enmity of the world, but also the powerful life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. The Apostolic ministry is, even now, the ministry of Christ in His Church, a present reality through which the Word of Life is Incarnate through His Body the Church. That is what the Scriptures for this day teach us. The Church is still Apostolic, in every meaningful way.

—oo0oo—

The Rev’d Robert Hart
October 28, 2009

¹ Preached at the Provincial Synod Mass of the Anglican Catholic Church, October, 2009.

² *Psalms and Lessons for the Fixed Holy Days* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xlv (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

³ Isaiah 28:9-16 (KJV).

⁴ Ephesians 2:11-18 (KJV).

⁵ Genesis 20:7.

⁶ II Timothy 3:5 (KJV).