

Simon and Jude - Apostles.

On this day the church remembers two of the apostles, Saint Simon and Saint Jude. Very little is known about Saint Simon. His only mention by name in the New Testament being in the various lists of the apostles. Jude, on the other hand, is mentioned on several occasions, not least within the long discourse by Jesus at the Last Supper. This discourse is recorded in the gospel of John and our reading today is a small part of it and comprises the continuation of an answer to a question raised earlier by Jude. That question being, "Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?"

Some early Christian writers say that Simon and Jude went together on a mission to Persia and died there. If this is true it explains why they are usually put together in the commemoration of Saints. The name Jude can also be translated as Judas and in the New Testament Jude is sometimes referred to as Judas (not Iscariot) to distinguish him from the betrayer of Jesus. The Epistle of Jude could well have been written by the apostle Jude, but it could also have been written by Judas, the brother of James, who was also the brother of Jesus. It may be the case that Jude (the apostle) and Jude (the brother of James) were one and the same person and this would make Jude the other brother of Jesus. This, however, is uncertain. In any case, today we remember Simon, one of the twelve, Judas (also called Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus) and Jude (the brother of James) who wrote the Epistle although Judas and Jude might possibly be the same person.

To come back, though, to the question Jude asked Jesus. We know that the answer Jesus gave was this, 'those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words...' So, the answer to the question of how Christians are able to comprehend the fact that Jesus is the Son of God, the one who reveals His nature and imparts His will to humanity, is that they are those who love Jesus. In fact, by the answer Jesus gave, that is all one needs to do because if we love Jesus, we will keep His word and everything else we need to do will follow from that. Furthermore, those who love Jesus will be able to recognise that the Holy Spirit has indeed come to them and made His home with them. The Holy Spirit is, of course, available for all people but one first needs to recognise that fact, love God, love Jesus and allow Him to come into one's life.

In contrast, those who do not love Jesus will not recognise Him nor will they recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit and, in terms of Jude's question, they are those who make up the world. But is it really quite so black and white? The reasoning here is characteristic of the gospel of John. For John, things are black and white. Those who believe in God and those who don't. The Church and the world. Those who are not for us, are necessarily against us. The actual situation, though, must surely be more nuanced than that.

William Barclay gives a rather nice definition of what the gospel of John means when it uses the idea of *the world*. He says this, 'by the *world* John meant *human society organising itself without God*.' And this definition leads naturally to a more inclusive definition of the word 'us' in Jude's question. And that is this, 'by the word *us* John means *human society organising itself with God*' and everybody who does that, by definition, loves Jesus even if they may not specifically realise the fact. The thing is, there are many other faiths who believe in God and attempt, in their own ways, to organise their society with reference to God. Both Jews and Muslims also believe in God, albeit in different ways to each other and to us, but we do share that basic belief in common with those faiths. Even different denominations of the same religion have their own theologies and understand God in different ways. This is why the definition of Barclay is so inclusive. It includes all those who have a belief in God. (It could, however, still be argued that this also is black and white, and I suppose it is!)

The German Jesuit priest and writer, Karl Rahner (1904-1984), developed an inclusive theology of salvation which recognised these ideas. He accepted Christianity as the absolute and fundamental religion but recognised that there was a problem in that those who lived before Jesus came as well as those who have never heard about Jesus or have heard about Him but in ways that lead to disbelief, rather than belief, seemed to be excluded from salvation. This, of course, is contrary to the universal saving will of God. Rahner therefore defined the term "anonymous Christians" which included all those people who believe in God in their own ways and live that belief in their lives. He cautioned, though, that that shouldn't exclude them from the mission of the church whose mission it is to spread the word of Jesus to all peoples of the world.

Ultimately, although this is all very interesting, all we really need to take from these thoughts, inspired by Simon and Jude, our fellow disciples, is that we should attempt to follow the words of Jesus in our own ways as best as we can whilst, at the same time, loving each other and loving God, knowing that Jesus is here with us today and forever.

Mervyn. (25th October 2020.)

