

Meditations: October 28, Saints Simon and Jude

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-ninth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: Simon's passion for God; Judas Thaddeus's question; the full freedom of love.

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TODAY WE are celebrating the feast of the apostles Simon and Judas Thaddeus, who share a feast because the New Testament always names them together when the Twelve are listed. According to some ancient traditions, both of them are thought to have preached and been martyred in Mesopotamia, a region in the Near East between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, corresponding to some areas of present-day Iraq and Syria.

The Gospel of Saint Luke tells us that Simon was *called the Zealot* (Lk 6:15). The word had two meanings: on the one hand, it referred to a zealous, passionate person, and on the other, it described members or sympathizers of a popular movement that opposed Roman rule by refusing to pay taxes and promoting various kinds of revolts. Simon probably shared this group's beliefs. His nickname indicates that he was

known for his “passionate attachment to his Jewish identity, and hence, for God, his People and divine Law. If this was the case, Simon was worlds apart from Matthew, who, on the contrary, had an activity behind him as a tax collector that was frowned upon as entirely impure. This shows that Jesus called his disciples and collaborators, without exception, from the most varied social and religious backgrounds. It was people who interested Him, not social classes or labels!”^[1]

The apostles, for all their differences, knew how to live together because Jesus gave them a reason for cohesion: they were united in Him. “This is clearly a lesson for us who are often inclined to accentuate differences and even contrasts, forgetting that in Jesus Christ we are given the strength to get the better of our continual conflicts.”^[2] That's why

the Prelate of Opus Dei encourages a Christian fraternity that overcomes “biases in our relations with one another, which could arise when we notice our differences. In reality, this diversity is often a richness of characters, sensitivities, interests, etc.”^[3] The figure of Saint Simon shows us that it's possible to love others beyond natural sympathies or antipathies, loving each other “as true brothers or sisters, with the dealings and understanding proper to those who form a closely united family.”^[4]

ST. JUDAS Thaddeus, whose name means ‘magnanimous,’ asked Jesus a question at the Last Supper: *Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?* (Jn 14:22). We might ask the same question today: why didn't Jesus

reveal his resurrection more spectacularly? Why didn't He ensure that his adversaries saw his victory? Why did He only choose a few disciples to bear witness to his resurrection?

Jesus's response is perplexing at first glance, but it introduces us to the mystery of God's relationship with humanity, as well as the deeper meaning of his death and resurrection: *If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (Jn 14:23)*. On the other hand, the Lord adds, *He who does not love me does not keep my words (Jn 14:24)*. "This means that the Risen One must be seen, must be perceived also by the heart, in a way so that God may take up his abode within us. The Lord does not appear as a thing. He desires to enter our lives, and therefore his manifestation is a manifestation that implies and

presupposes an open heart. Only in this way do we see the Risen One.”^[5] —

Sometimes, we may wish that Jesus would act in our lives or in the events that shape the world’s history more visibly, immediately. He could do so now, just as He could have during his life on earth, but this is not God’s way of acting. Jesus Christ, who died and rose for us, shows Himself to us at once radiant and discreet. He challenges our sensitivity and our ability to open ourselves and recognize Him in daily life, in subtle beauty or blinding pain, as well as in the slow back-and-forth of nurturing personal relationships.

In all of this, Jesus offers us his friendly hand to extend his kingdom of charity with magnanimity. We understand that He “desires ardently to rule our hearts, because we are children of God. But we should not

try to imagine a human sort of rule — Christ does not dominate or seek to impose himself, because he ‘has not come to be served but to serve.’ His kingdom is one of peace, of joy, of justice. Christ our king does not expect us to spend our time in abstract reasoning; he expects deeds, because ‘not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord!, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven.’”^[6]

TRADITION NAMES St. Judas

Thaddeus as the author of one of the epistles in the New Testament. It is one of the so-called Catholic letters because it was addressed to all Christians, not just those in a particular city. Judas sends it *to those who are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ (Jude*

1:1). After this greeting, he warns Christians about some moral and doctrinal deviations that were entering the Church and causing divisions. Many of these problems were related to a false interpretation of Christian freedom, turning *the grace of our God into sensuality* (Jude 1:4).

In casual conversations, freedom can sometimes be reduced to doing whatever we please, whenever and however many times we want. But “the selfish freedom of doing what I want is not freedom, because it turns in on itself, it is not fruitful. It is Christ’s love that has freed us and it is love that also frees us from the worst slavery, that of the self; therefore, freedom increases with love. But beware: not with self-indulgent love, with the love of soap operas, not with the passion that simply seeks what we want and like, but with the love we see in Christ,

charity: this is the love that is truly free and freeing.”^[7] This is why Saint Judas Thaddeus concludes his letter by encouraging Christians to abide in God's love (cf. *Jude* 1:20), or, in other words, to act like Jesus did at all times by serving others and giving themselves generously. He had learned from the Master that it is possible to give one's life and embrace death “with the full freedom of Love.”^[8]

“Freedom finds its true meaning,” St. Josemaria commented, “when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God's infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery.”^[9] That is how both Simon and Judas Thaddeus lived. They show us that a life centered on Christ and in service to others, our brothers and sisters, leads to a profound happiness that frees us from the bondage of sin. Our

Lady can help us live with the
freedom of the children of God.

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 11-X-2006.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral letter, 16-II-2023.

[4] St. Josemaría, Letter 30, No. 28.

[5] Pope Benedict XVI, Audience, 11-X-2006.

[6] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 93.

[7] Pope Francis, Audience, 20-X-2021.

[8] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Tenth Station.

^[9] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 27.

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