



ST. STEPHEN'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH
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Trinity 20
October 14, 2018

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.**

The passage selected for the Sermon is taken from the Epistle:

“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; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”
Ephesians 2:19-22

When I was a young boy, my education included reading the lives of the Saints. My goal was to become a great saint, and why would I not aspire to be as heroic in Christ as the heroes of my novels and biographers were to their times. With the humility that comes from age, and honestly, with the selfishness that indulges my less saintly inclinations, I forget my youthful goal, and that is a mistake, for we are called to be saints, and called to be great saints.

This week we celebrate the feast of two of the less well-known Apostles and saints, St. Simon and St. Jude. Next week, we celebrate All Saints Day. In this arc between the two feasts,

it is appropriate we consider the character of a saint, and what about that character is edifying for us in our own travail and journey. After all, we too, are saints in the making. We will not likely reach that pantheon of holiness that causes that church to single us out for our lives, but we are saints in making nonetheless, and God willing, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with the great saints the Church has venerated in the glory and love of God.

The cornerstone of a saintly life is sacrifice. We often mistake suffering for sacrifice. Everyone suffers in this world, but not everyone sacrifices. To sacrifice is to take the suffering the world offers and make the experience an offering of thanksgiving, penitence and humility to God. It is said St. Simon, who was martyred when he was very old, suffered the torture with such grace and peace that he converted his chief persecutor.

That self-sacrificing spirit that is so powerful it can convert our persecutors has a far more humble beginning. The character of self-sacrifice grows from the willingness to surrender the pride that makes us believe we should own and control our own lives. It is reflected in our expectation or frustration that any other person should exercise authority over us and extends to our rejection of the obedience

we owe to God in every aspect of our lives. That battle with pride sometimes take the form of privilege we assume for our position or wealth or responsibilities. It can also take the form of indignation and anger that forces beyond our control, even God, have power over us to frustrate our willfulness. In St. Simon and Jude, we see each of manifestations of pride as the obstacles they had to overcome to become Apostles and saints.

St Jude was a much older but close relative to Jesus. He and James the Less were brothers, and either the sons of Mary and Cleophas, cousins to Jesus, or, as we allow in the Anglican Tradition, the half brothers of Jesus from Joseph's first marriage. In either case, the much older Jude make an exceptional act of humility to subjugate himself to his younger relation. In a similar situation, our Old Testament Joseph of the many colored coat, inspired such resentment and ill will that his brothers meant to murder him, but settled for selling him off to slavery in Egypt. It doesn't take too much imagination to understand how an act of humility like St. Jude's might be difficult for us as well.

St. Simon is known as Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were a fanatical anti-Roman religious sect. In terms common to our times, they were, essentially, terrorists. Barabbas, a documented murderer was a Zealot. It was the Zealot outpost at Masada that courageously held off the Roman Legion. 1,000 men battled the greatest power of the age, and when they were finally going to be overwhelmed, all 1,000 committed suicide rather than surrender victory to the Romans. St Paul describes himself as having been zealous for the law in his pre-Christian life, and that zeal included complicity

in the murder of St. Stephen and pursuing the Christians to imprison and harass them in Jerusalem and Antioch.

We know that anger and frustration in our days. It seems to define us. Yesterday's attack on a synagogue in Pittsburgh, the worldwide attack on Christianity brought to our shores repeatedly since 9/11 look very much like the outrage of the Zealots. And our rage is not restricted to religion. Whether bombs in the mail, or shooting of Congressmen playing baseball, it is a sense of wounded pride that makes us lash out violently against those who we imagine frustrate our ambitions and offend our sensibilities. When brutally honest, we see the roots of that violence are close to home when we are relentlessly cynical, disrespectful, envious or impatient with those around us.

It could be argued these two saints are tailored to the struggle of our times to achieve our own saintliness. Their victories pride, privilege, envy, resentment and anger are perfect examples to us for the battle we face in our own lives. We are called to be great saints. To be a great saint requires courage and persistence in our battle with the evil of our time and in our hearts.

Let's take their example to heart, and pray for the grace they perfected in their lives to become the light of the Holy Spirit that shines through our own lives. Let's follow them into the path of saintliness.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen