



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York

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Sunday, October 28, 2012

The Feast of Saint Simon and Saint Jude

Festal Evensong

at 4pm

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A Sermon by

The Reverend Victor Lee Austin, Ph.D.

on

Saint John 14:15-31

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SAINT JUDE'S QUESTION

Not much is known about Saints Simon and Jude, but we do know that they were disciples of Jesus; and thus, as for every saint, the point of their life was to know Jesus and make him known. So this evening let's focus on one remarkable question that Saint Jude asked. This Jude is "Judas," one of the Twelve, not Judas Iscariot (as Saint John is careful to point out). He put his question to Jesus during the Last Supper. And it is question truly worth remarking upon because it points to a mystery: Why do some people "see," that is, understand and follow, Jesus, while others are blind to him?

As I said, this question comes up at the Last Supper. Jesus has told his disciples that he will be going away, that he is going to his Father, but he has also been explaining that he will return. He has said this in several ways. "Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. . . . In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." And what Saint Jude wants to know is, how can this happen? How can Jesus manifest himself to believers but not to everyone?

The initial question, perhaps, is about Jesus' physical return. If Jesus were to walk down the street, how could he be seen by some (who believe in him) and not by all the world? Or if Jesus were to be elected President, how could that fact not be known to all the world? If Jesus physically manifests himself, how could that manifestation be limited to believers?

But the question, it seems to me, is just as pertinent if we think of a "spiritual" manifestation. How is it that only some people "see" Jesus? All my life I have wondered at this. I am and have been a believer in Jesus, while my best friend at college wasn't and isn't. Some people have faith and some don't. What's the deal? Why doesn't everyone see Jesus as the way, the truth, the life, the loving and self-sacrificing center of all reality?

There are a number of partial answers, each of which is only partially satisfactory.

Some people don't know Jesus or, knowing Jesus, don't love him because they have freely chosen to be bad people. If you turn down the path of wickedness, you turn of course not only against Jesus but against humanity, and you turn ultimately into something horribly sub-human—the analogue of a devil rather than an angel. Nonetheless, as long as this life continues, we do believe repentance is ever a possibility. And more to the point, many of those who don't know Jesus are not among those who have chosen wickedness.

Some people don't know Jesus because they simply have not been evangelized: no one has ever set forth the good news of Jesus to them. So it's not wickedness in their case, but ignorance.

Still there are many who to all appearances are people of good will, who have heard the Gospel presented in a true and faithful and clear way, who nevertheless do not love and follow Jesus. How can this be?

That, I think, is Jude's question. And perhaps it is your question too.

In Jesus' answer to Jude we see that it has to do with the mystery of love, and with the mystery of God's own Being as the Triune God—which perhaps ultimately is the same as the mystery of love. Here's what Jesus says. If someone loves Jesus, then that person keeps Jesus' word. And if someone keeps Jesus' word, the Father will love that person. And when the Father loves someone, he comes with Jesus to make their home with him. The way that Jesus manifests himself to a believer is through this indwelling, through the Father and the Son coming to make their home with the believer, the one who loves Jesus. In this picture, we start with someone loving Jesus. Love of Jesus is shown in keeping Jesus' word. That brings, in response, the love of Jesus' Father, who then comes with Jesus to make their home with the one who started with the love of Jesus. And all this starts with someone loving Jesus.

But Jesus goes on as it were to back up and give a fuller answer which shows that this indwelling in the believer is fully trinitarian. So Jesus says that, after he departs, the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his, Jesus', name to teach believers all things and particularly to keep in their remembrance everything that he, Jesus, has told them. So they won't have to worry about forgetting Jesus' words; the Holy Spirit will keep those words in their remembrance. Thus the Father provides what is needed for the disciples to love Jesus and to keep his word: the word, the commandments, that the believers keep are at hand because the Holy Spirit is with them to keep them in mind. That is to say, the Holy Spirit is something like God's own personal vanguard who goes ahead to the disciples so that the Father and the Son may come and dwell with the disciples, whom the Father loves because they keep Jesus' words, which they keep because they love Jesus!

If this sounds circular to you, it is because in human reasoning it cannot but sound circular. On the one hand, it is our love for Jesus that starts the whole process going: love leads to obedience leads to the Father's love leads to the indwelling of Father and Son in the believer. On the other hand, it is the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father, who makes possible the remembrance of Jesus and his words which leads to the love and obedience which leads to the Father and Son coming to dwell with the believer. In the first case, the initiation was human, it was our love for Jesus; in the second case, the initiation was divine, it was God's gift of the Holy Spirit that enabled our love. And here we are at a rock-bottom mystery of God's ways with us. We are never able on our own to act in such a way as to bring about love of God or obedience or a life in communion with God. It is always, always, always necessary for *God* to take the first step, to

give us something more than our human existence, to give us grace, to send his Holy Spirit ahead to us. On the other hand, it is always, always, always necessary for us to love Jesus, to long to live in his word, to keep his commandments which are, in sum, to live always in accordance with love. *We* must do that; no one else can do it for us.

Why do some “see” Jesus in this way, and love and follow him, while others don’t? It is Saint Jude’s question, and perhaps it is yours too; it is certainly mine. Some day we may get to ask Jesus ourselves. But in the meantime, our task is clear. Like all the saints, we are to give thanks for the Holy Spirit, to love Jesus, and to live out of that love in accordance to Jesus’ words.