

Homily for the Feast Day of Saints Simon and Jude
October 29, 2016

In the 11th Chapter of the Book of Genesis we have the story of the Tower of Babel. At the heart of that story is the motivation given by the builders for constructing the Tower.

“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

What drives these people to build their tower is so they will make a name for themselves. Their tower will be a testimony and a monument that will stand as evidence of their architectural ingenuity so that long after they are gone the Tower will remain.

How common it is for us as human beings to want to be remembered, to make a name for ourselves. We think that what will secure our posterity are buildings and monuments attesting to our greatness.

The truth of this was brought home to me in the summer of 2014. I was in Rome for the first time in my life walking around the Palatine Hill. This is a large area in the City that at one time housed the great home of the Emperors. In the 2nd Century it would have been the Jewel of the Empire’s Capital. Its onetime former glory is now in ruins. From the vantage point of the Palatine Hill I looked off in the distance and there was St. Peter’s standing confidently and it struck me: Here are two buildings that represent two very different philosophies. The Palatine Hill represents the epitome of man making a name for himself. Now it is in ruins. St. Peter’s represents the epitome of men willing to die for the name of another, Jesus Christ.

I love the story told of Francis Cardinal George. In April of 2005 the newly elected pope Benedict XVI came onto the front loggia of St. Peter’s Basilica to bless the crowds. Gathered around him on the adjoining balconies there appeared all of the cardinals who had just chosen him. The news cameras caught the remarkably pensive expression on the face of Cardinal Francis George of Chicago. When the cardinal returned home, reporters asked him what he was thinking about at that moment. Here is what he said:

“I was gazing over toward the Circus Maximus, toward the Palatine Hill where the Roman Emperors once resided and reigned and looked down upon the persecution of Christians, and I thought, ‘Where are their successors? Where is the successor of Caesar Augustus? Where is the successor of Marcus Aurelius? And finally, who cares? But if you want to see the successor of Peter, he is right next to me, smiling and waving at the crowds.’”

Here is an irony of history. Those who lived for the name of another, the Lord Jesus Christ are part of that living organism Cardinal George was considering. Those who made a name for themselves are a footnote in history but not part of a living and dynamic community.

Paul speaks about nature of this living community when in today’s Epistle he writes:

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,¹

This dear friends is no Tower of Babel , no Emperors' palace. This is the living body of Christ built on the foundation of Apostles whose names were Simon and Jude and ten others. Two we know a lot about, Peter and John, James not as much, one we know committed suicide and the others like Jude and Simon we know by name. All we know about Simon was he was a first century revolutionary, called a Zealot, before becoming one of the twelve and would have hated the like of Matthew the Tax Collector.

But it is from the rag tag collection of Jewish misfits that the Church was established. People who understood that the whole structure of this living organism is held together by Jesus Christ.

Although we have not been called to be apostles as were Simon and Jude; like them we are called to identify with that the name that really matters most, Jesus' name.

When we give ourselves to Jesus we discover that holiness does not depend on human merit, culture, personality, effort, or achievement. It is entirely God's creation and gift. God needs no Zealots to bring about the kingdom by force. Jude, like all the saints, is the saint of the impossible: Only God can create his divine life in human beings. And God wills to do so, for all of us as we realize that I don't need to make a name for myself but rather live honouring the name of the one whose kingdom is not of this world.

It was this that Saints Simon and Jude did in their lives and it is what all the saints discover. In honouring Jesus' name the discover their own name by giving glory to him.

¹ *The Holy Bible*. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Eph 2:19–20). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.