

Homily - St. Jude Feast Day 2023

According to an ancient legend, two thousand years ago, there was a king named Abgar who ruled the great city of Edessa, in modern-day Turkey.

The early Christian historian Eusebius recalls that, as the story goes, King Abgar fell ill with leprosy and became desperate for a cure.

At that time, rumors began to reach Edessa of a powerful healer, Jesus of Nazareth, who was renowned for the miracles he was working throughout Judea.

So, Abgar sent a messenger named Ananias to travel and find this Jesus, and request that he follow him to Edessa and cure the king's illness.

After a long journey, Ananias finally made it to the place where Jesus was staying, and delivered the king's message.

What was the response? Jesus refused, saying that his mission in Israel was not yet complete.

But he was touched by King Abgar's faith, and promised that in time, he would send a messenger of his own, an apostle who would carry his Gospel to the king's land.

On receiving this news, the king asked one of the artists of his kingdom to return to Jesus so he could at least see an image of this man who would become revered as the Son of God.

That was the moment of the first miracle. The artist had hoped to paint Jesus's image, but the Lord did something greater: he took a cloth, pressed it to his face, and as he handed it to the artist it mysteriously took on the appearance of a beautiful portrait of Christ.

And the artist did not return alone.

True to his word, Jesus sent one of his apostles - Jude, also known as Thaddeus, accompanied him to Edessa, and as they presented the image of Christ to King Abgar, he felt the Lord's power wash over him, and from that moment, the king

was cured, and for the rest of his life remained a fervent follower of the Gospel, perhaps the first of the Christian kings in history.

Today, most people have forgotten this legend, but most images of Saint Jude, including here in our own parish, still show him holding this image of Christ as he carried it to Edessa.

Was Saint Jude the one who healed the king? No.

But he was the one who brought the Gospel, and his Lord's healing graces, to someone who, for all his worldly power, was caught in what seemed like a hopeless situation.

That, at its heart, is what being an apostle, and living out a life of ministry as a follower of Jesus Christ, is all about.

We can imagine that for Saint Jude, the idea of traveling leagues away from the comfort of his homeland could have been an intimidating, perhaps even terrifying thought.

But by that time, he had shared enough time with his Lord, and grown in his trust and friendship with Jesus, that he was able to carry out that and so many other missions, even carrying on the work of founding the Church itself after Christ's Ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

And he didn't stop, not until the very day of his martyrdom, when he was reunited with the one who had first set him on that life of mission and service.

Believe it or not, you and I are called to a similar mission.

We may not preach to kings, but we carry the same Gospel.

We might not travel to foreign nations, but we can still bring the healing presence of our Redeemer.

Our call to holiness invites us to live with an apostolic courage - like the saints, we have to set aside our fear of the unknown to bring the light of faith to those who are still trapped in personal and spiritual darkness.

For us in this parish, this call touches on every dimension of our lives as Catholics.

It begins from our worship, from the heart of our faith in the sacraments we receive and the liturgies we celebrate.

Like the apostles, this is where we grow in our friendship with the Lord, and receive the gifts of faith, hope, and love that we need to live our Christian vocations.

It impels us to carry out the work of preaching and evangelization, to deepen our study of the Word of God in the living tradition of the Church and the texts of Sacred Scripture.

It should move our hearts as we see the suffering and spiritual and material needs of our neighbors, the very needs that we would be tempted to write off as a hopeless cause, not just to offer our prayers and support from a distance, but to look for new opportunities to meet them face to face and to love them in the most direct and personal way.

As the Holy Father himself reminds us, “No one must say that they cannot be close to the poor because their own lifestyle demands more attention to other areas.”

And so, on this beautiful feast, our patronal celebration, we ask our Lord to give us the same gifts he gave his apostles, and strengthen us with the same courage and love for our mission.

And we should not be afraid to invite the Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and show us where we still need to grow - where our courage has failed, where we have been blinded to the needs of our neighbors, and where the Lord is inviting us to draw closer to his Sacred and Eucharistic Heart.

It all begins here, in the heart of his Church, but must never end at the doors of our parish buildings.

After all, the work of an apostle is never done.

Today, then, we pray that our Lord will give us the same zeal, the same courage, and the same love that he gave to Saint Jude and to all his faithful disciples, and

pray that one day, we will share in their reward - the joy of his friendship, and the promise of heavenly glory.