

Dear Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, the not-so-saintly Irish playwright and poet of the late 19th century is always the right place to start when you need to introduce something to ponder. No doubt many will not see past the cause célèbre of his libel and criminal trials and subsequent imprisonment. Not to acknowledge that is to overlook the seditious scandal that it was and the notoriety that it unleashed in the ever-devouring scandal sheets that originated in Fleet Street.

That aside, it was a quote of Wilde's that is often misquoted that lives on which for me is part of my reflection looking at the holy lives of Jude Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot. In the opening chapter of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Lord Henry Wotton expressed his shock that the painter Basil Hallward declined to have the painting of Dorian Gray exhibited at the Grosvenor. He admonished him by saying:

'Not send it anywhere? My dear fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps you painters are! You do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one, you seem to want to throw it away. It is silly of you, for there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men quite jealous if old men are ever capable of any emotion.'

If indeed, old men are ever capable of any emotion! Embedded in there is "only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about." In context, it takes on a different sense of understanding as we look at our celebrities that we recall today.

The cult of celebrity is nothing new. Even in defence of libel, Wilde turned to the scandalous relationships in history. If it were not disgraceful, would we talk about them still? I don't think so. But what of all the good stories? Where are the stories of such that we look seek? Is this why we have so many generations who have invented their idea of a superhero to take the place of genuine historical goodness? Why is it that a scandal is thus easier to remember and titillate our understanding than fame won by pure virtue and talent alone?

Our dear Irishman also wrote in his infamous work,

I love scandals about other people, but scandals about myself don't interest me. They have not got the charm of novelty.

So, what of the scandal that gives us the cause célèbre in the life of the Church? At the heart of our mission to bring good news is a scandal. It is a scandal of wanting autonomy from God. The second account of creation and the story of the 'fall' is exactly about that much scandal. At the heart of the temptation in Genesis 3 is the temptation made to Eve that will make her not only as knowledgeable as God in matters good and evil but end the dependence on the Creator. The story places in the words in the mouth of the serpent, the tempter,

'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' (Genesis 3.4)

One eating of the fruit of the Tree of Life, immediately, they sought to conceal themselves from God. Naked and afraid, they clothed themselves hoping to hide from God the scandal they had just committed. The point of the story is often mixed up with other agendas, but at the heart of the scandal is this thought: each one of us is gifted the ability to know the difference between good and evil and will be held accountable for our decisions.

Then there is the scandal of Jesus of Nazareth, our Lord and Saviour. Unjustly sentenced to death, nailed to a tree and left to rot, the scandal or stumbling block that was the cross would be folly to some, and a pain for others. Having not concealed his origins, and stripped naked before the whole world and lifted, that point of separation from God was there for all to see as Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" And then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

The Gospel of Luke tells us that the Temple curtain that concealed the Holy of Holies was ripped in half. Torn asunder, this revealed the abandonment of God from the House that was first conceived by David, initially built by Solomon, and rebuilt by Herod. The temple was exposed for what it was: devoid of God's presence.

But that scandal continued when on the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus, he appeared, first to women, and then to his followers, of whom Jude Thaddeus and Simon the Zealot were two. On the fiftieth day after Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, that same spirit which Jesus gave up on his death breathed new life into our relationship that was to be between God and humanity. Still clothed, this time in righteousness, the knowledge of good and evil remained, but more and more we are held accountable for our actions.

Being accountable, the life of the saints set out to take this message to all the world. It is believed that Simon the Zealot, a name we know not really why it was given, became the second bishop of Jerusalem, after James, brother of our Lord, was martyred. That shameful act was a hammer dropped from a high wall. Judas, son of James, possibly Thaddeus of the other accounts, later joined with Simon after the sacking of Jerusalem and led missions into what is modern day Iran. We believe they were martyred in Persia, and even though our bible does not tell us much about the Assyrian and Persian churches, we know that together with Thomas, the gospel went well into India and China.

And here is the irony that I reflected on for today. We don't know much about Simon and Jude's scandalous living and can only speculate about them for the good that they achieved. They were in the presence of Jesus, God incarnates, and followed the Great Commission of Matthew's gospel: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. I remember this: I am with you to the end of time."

Being in the company of the one that opened the way back to the very presence of God by his death and resurrection, the celebrity of the saints is unknown, but their work and drive that led to the faith of the Church are still seen and growing. Nothing seems to have changed in Fleet Street, other than the papers no longer being there, for the scandal of bringing down people with salacious gossip is just as strong as it is today. And like the quote of Wilde from Dorian Gray suggests, we are still talking about it, giving the tabloids the justification for their existence.

Then, we look to the celebrities that are the Saints, and today, not knowing much about them, apart from a lovely idea that Jude Thaddeus will find things for us, cure our cats, and even remove the rabbits from the Vicarage garden – we celebrate their goodness. Like them, we also make disciples and baptise two this week! John Lee Tet, and Oliver Hamilton! And like the saints that are surrounding us from the past, they will also have the choice to make about good and evil. And we are here to journey with them as they do. Who knows, maybe it will be St Oliver Hamilton and St John Lee Tet who will be celebrated on high in the years to come, without even the hint of the scandal that led to them being remembered!