

Homily For Tuesday of the 10th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - June 11, 2023

(Memorial - St. Barnabas, Apostle)

Acts 11:21-26,13: 1-3 "After fasting and praying they laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them."

Psalm 98 "All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God."

Matthew 10:7-13 "As you go, proclaim the good news: The kingdom of heaven has come near."

Called and Sent

Entrance Antiphon: *Blessed is this holy man, who was worthy to be numbered among the Apostles, for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith.*

Collect: *O God, who decreed that St Barnabas, a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, should be set apart to convert the nations, grant that he Gospel of Christ, which he strenuously preached, may be faithfully proclaimed by word and by deed.*

Introduction

It is always striking to me when we put on red vestments. There is no season of red in the liturgical year. It comes up on individual feast days. It is the colour of the Holy Spirit, which came down on the disciples at Pentecost, red like tongues of fire. Red is also the colour of blood, the blood of the martyrs. We sometimes hear the phrase of early Church Father, Tertullian, who declared that "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." This is a reminder that when there are conversions to Christ, there will be persecutions. Strong tradition says that St. Barnabas, whose memorial we celebrate today, was stoned to death less than 30 years after Jesus was killed on the cross. Like the blood of Christ shed for us, so does the blood of Barnabas become a sign of the kingdom of heaven.

He was not an original Apostle, although it would be reasonable to say that his leadership is very much like a Bishop, one of those appointed to carry out the work of the first Bishops, the Apostles. He was the one assigned to mentor Saul in the Christian faith after his dramatic conversion on the road. He was Saul's RCIA sponsor while he was getting his feet wet about Jesus Christ. He was also the one that the Apostles sent from Jerusalem to make sure that what they had heard about the Church at Antioch was the real thing and not something faith.

Matthew

The Gospel is always going to be resisted. Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, and before the death and resurrection of their Lord and master, Jesus sent them out with very specific instructions to bring the message to the towns that the kingdom of heaven is near. They were to totally trust God. Go without anything except the Gospel. He had given them his own power over sickness, death and the demons, of course. These would be the signs that the kingdom of heaven is near. But that was in the past for them in the time of the Church. There were healings, but primarily they had only the message that that they were to proclaim with boldness. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church largely replaced the power to heal. The healing they were offering was now a much deeper invitation to be transformed by the power of that Spirit, to be made ready for the kingdom of heaven.

There would be suffering for this message of Good News, but also joy in joining that suffering to that of Christ. Contemporary spiritual writer, Fr. Jacques Philippe, beautifully makes this connection: "By accepting the sufferings offered by life and allowed by God for our progress and purification, we spare ourselves much harder ones. We need to stop dreaming of a life without suffering or conflict. That is the life of heaven, not earth. The bitterness of that cross will sooner or later be transformed into sweetness."

Barnabas

Barnabas was chosen by the church in Antioch as they prayed and fasted, discerning who to send. His name means 'Son of Encouragement' because he made it possible for Paul's voice to be heard throughout the church. That voice could have been lost without him, just like the Saviour himself could have been lost to the world without Mary's yes. Now we know that God's plan of salvation is always furthered, by those who participate in it and even through those who don't. Based on that, we would have been redeemed whether Mary said yes or no. However, we honour her, not because she is great, but because she gave her the grace to be that instrument in his plan to share his own blessed life with broken and fallen humanity.

The same is true for Barnabas. Everyone was afraid of Paul. They thought he was faking his conversion to infiltrate the Church to destroy it. But Barnabas made it possible for this dangerous man to be received by the Church there in Antioch, so that he could go far and wide, armed with nothing but the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Call To Conversion

I gradually come to see in my life the many people with whom it is not safe to share the Gospel. The great sadness is that some of those people are ones who are very close to me, whom I love very much. That's the influence of the world. The world, Jesus says, hates the Good News. When he sends the twelve out to proclaim it, he asks them to go with nothing else but the news that the kingdom of heaven has come near.

You and I don't have to go to that extent in our roles as disciples. But we can be sons and daughters of encouragement. Who can I encourage today by a text, email or conversation. Are we ready to walk with Jesus into the ordinary places of our lives, some good, some distressing? Are we prayerfully ready to walk into a pagan world that is doing everything it can to suck the life back out of the Good News, to push away the kingdom of heaven. Let us today ask the intercession of Barnabas himself. Let him know our own discouragement. What are our instructions two thousand years after the first Pentecost? Fast --- pray --- listen to the Holy Spirit call us --- let the Church mentor us and send us to encourage some small part of the world around us. St. Barnabas pray for us.