

Feast Day of St. Barnabas  
 June 11, 2020  
 Acts 11:21b–26, 13:1–3  
 Psalm 98:1–6  
 Matthew 10:7–13

Barnabas, a Jew of Cyprus, comes as close as anyone outside the Twelve to being a full-fledged apostle. He was closely associated with St. Paul (he introduced Paul to Peter and the other apostles) and served as a kind of mediator between the former persecutor and the still suspicious Jewish Christians.

When a Christian community developed at Antioch, Barnabas was sent as the official representative of the Church of Jerusalem to incorporate them into the fold.

We are given insight into the kind of man Barnabas was from today's reading from Acts. For here we read of the beginnings of his relationship with the Antiochian Church. Prior to Barnabas' arrival, there had been an increase of believers in Antioch. When those in Jerusalem heard of this St. Luke tells us:

*News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; <sup>24</sup> for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord<sup>1</sup>*

Barnabas means "Son of Encouragement". The word encourage means to strengthen one's heart which of course is the opposite of someone who disheartens. He was someone who encouraged others because of who he was becoming in Christ. We are told three things about his character. First he was a good man. He was a genuine caring man who was true to his word and loyal. Such loyalty was shown to his nephew Mark. When Paul wanted to revisit the places they had evangelized, Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark, his cousin, author of the Gospel (April 25), but Paul insisted that, since Mark had deserted them once, he was not fit to take along now. Although this is somewhat speculative, if Barnabas had not stayed with Mark when Paul decided he needed to move on without this younger Christian, Mark might have fallen away from the faith and we would not have the Gospel written by him. Barnabas goodness made a difference in Mark's life and by extension ours because of the Gospel we now have.

He was also full of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was able to so work in Barnabas' life to perfect his character. Barnabas was open to the working of the Lord in his life and this again

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Ac 11:22–24). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

allowed him to be patient with others as the Holy Spirit was at work within them. His Nephew Mark was a case in point.

We are told that thirdly he was also full of faith. He whole heartedly believed intellectually in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He knew that this is the news that makes all the difference in how we see the world and therefore live our lives. This allowed him in turn to exhort the Christians of Antioch to remain faithful to the Lord with “steadfast devotion.”

These last two words “steadfast devotion” are worth pondering. The word devotion in this case means something that is well thought out and planned in advance. The word we translate as “steadfast” in Greek is the word “kardia” which means “heart”. We see therefore that Barnabas who was the Son of Encouragement wanted these new believers to be transformed from the inside out - that is from the heart - so they could daily, intentionally and thoughtfully serve the Lord

May we be inspired by Barnabas’ example and so be encouraged in our own lives to pray with steadfast devotion so that we would be become increasingly good people full of the Holy Spirit and faith. These are the qualities God uses to hearten others.

St. Barnabas pray for us that increasingly St. Peter’s would be known as a community of encouragement filled with good men and women filled with the Holy Spirit and Faith.