

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Jun 11th 2013

Reading today's scriptural excerpts, and thinking about this saint's feast day, I am sorry that I never paid much attention to St. Barnabas before. According to Acts, he was a wonderful person. He was a true Apostle in the early church, although not one of the original Twelve around Jesus at the Last Supper. Our liturgical first reading includes much of Chapter 11, and then skips to a part of Chapter 12 that tells us that Barnabas and Paul were specifically chosen by God to spread the Good News about our salvation in Jesus Christ. Beyond this point of the narrative, Barnabas travels and preaches and suffers with Paul. Later Paul continues with Silas, and the rest of Barnabas's story goes unrecorded.

While I still don't know much about Barnabas, today's first reading shows him to be a wise and compassionate leader of the very early Church, even before Christians were called Christians. People recognized that he was "a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith." If today we can't hear his effective preaching, we can see his excellent example of Christian faith and service. In response, today's Psalm sings, "The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power."

Appropriately, the Gospel for today is this short excerpt from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. Coming right after the Beatitudes in yesterday's Gospel, these verses continue Jesus's teaching of what being "Blessed" means: being "salt" and "light" for the world. Salt and light are created things, essential for our worldly life, and metaphors for graces essential to sharing faith, to knowing, loving, and serving God. Jesus tells his disciples to let people know of their faith in God and of their good deeds so that the light of faith may spread throughout the world.

Today I am reflecting about people who have been "salt" for me, and groups that have been the "city on a hill" for me. When life is tasteless and dark, I have the example of famous people ranging from St. Barnabas in the early Church to St. Ignatius Loyola in later history to Mother Teresa in my own lifetime, and other saints among my relatives, friends and colleagues. These people reveal "God's saving power" by their words and actions -- not so much by formal preaching and teaching as by their personal example. I can remember being surprised and encouraged in faith by what someone said or did that revealed the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

For myself, I'm no longer teaching and never did much preaching (except to my own children!) but if anyone cares to notice, I wish to be one more example of one who joyfully believes "The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power."

Mary Haynes Kuhlman