

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, May 20th 2014

Our readings today tell of the trials of Paul and Barnabas as they trek through the Mideast converting believers to Christianity and also the message from Jesus of hope and peace. Paul and Barnabas did bring the good news to many in that area and certainly did bring hope along with it – Hope in eternal life and understanding that this life is transient yet what is offered in Christ is everlasting. That they endured the hardships that they did is clearly evidence of their commitment and obedience to a Higher Power. The resilience that they displayed is exemplary and enviable. I can't imagine what they faced day after day. I was curious about that geographic region and looked up some information about it. Not only was it a difficult place to travel physically, the route that they chose was even more difficult. Couple that with the less than enthusiastic welcome that they sometimes received, and surely, Paul and Barnabas lived a life of sacrifice and obedience. I know that I fall far short of that most days. . .

I was fascinated with the gospel and the message that Jesus brought to his disciples. The concept of “peace” is certainly one that we all embrace. While peace in general is, indeed, an aspiration for all involved, I took his gift of peace to be that inner peace – serenity – that so many of us strive to achieve. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you.” It is a great reminder to me that my true peace will not come from worldly possessions or accomplishments. I have to sometimes be explicit with myself when I allow my outlook and attitude to be influenced by those worldly things.

As I read this gospel over a few times what kept coming to mind were situations where I had to make choices between inner peace and some external reward. I remembered a time while I was in the Army Reserves of trying to explain to a superior that I wanted to step down from a position that was held in high regard to instead teach enlisted students. I recall his frustration when he asked what my goals were and I replied peace and serenity. He would say, no, no, I mean what are your goals. I'm sure he expected me to say some lofty power position or high rank. However, at that time I was exhausted from trying to fulfill both my teaching responsibilities with these soldiers (on a volunteer basis) and the demands of the other position. One night I felt completely overwhelmed to the point of tears and cried myself to sleep. When I awoke in the morning it was like a voice said to me, it doesn't have to be this way. I knew in my heart and soul that I needed to do what brought me peace and closer to God not keep twirling on this crazy merry-go-round. It was clear that my superior thought I was ill-advised to walk away from this great opportunity which no doubt would have afforded me one more promotion before I retired. I had to closely examine my motivation behind taking that position – it was probably related more to ego and earthly gains than to benefits that would lead me closer to my Savior.

Yet, truly it was “peace” that I was seeking, that I continue to seek. When I move toward this peace and allow myself to find that place where I truly listen to God, it is there that my “heart is not troubled or afraid.” When I try to do these things on my own, my human frailties will certainly be in the limelight . . . I must always remember that I'm not home yet . .

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