



## The Mission of Disciples

This week's first reading is about Paul and Barnabas. And it is also about us. As we read about the missionary work of these two disciples of Jesus, we recognize that their original identities were changed due to their calling to the work of Christ. Paul (which means, 'humble') was originally named Saul. He was a Jewish rabbi who hated the name of Jesus and persecuted the Church. But after encountering Jesus, Saul's life was radically transformed by grace, and he became one of the greatest missionary disciples of Jesus. Barnabas was formerly known as Joseph. But he was so supportive of the Apostles and the fledgling Church, that he was given the name 'Barnabas,' meaning, "Son of Encouragement."

But how is this reading about us? To begin with, we are members of St. Barnabas parish, named in honor of this great missionary disciple. And, like Paul and Barnabas, our lives are transformed by our baptism into Jesus Christ. Once we become His disciples, we are called to a new way of life, which brings encouragement, light, and hope to the world around us. Like Paul and Barnabas, Jesus also sends us as evangelists into the community around us as missionaries of the Gospel, the "good news." But do we really understand what the Gospel is? Why is it good news? We really cannot proclaim it well by word and action if we do not understand why it is so good.

There are three reasons why the Gospel is good news. The first has to do with our dignity as human beings. No doubt, life in this world is difficult. We are born with bodies which get cold, and hungry, and feel pain, and eventually die. More than the body, our minds are the source of much pain and confusion, as we try to figure out life's meaning, and who we really are. Beyond these natural challenges, human beings also suffer in countless ways due to immorality. All forms of immorality reduce human beings to a mere fleshly existence. The pursuit of physical pleasure can consume us, and cause us to treat others as mere fleshly objects, paying no mind to their dignity as human beings.

The message of Paul and Barnabas was well-received in Antioch, which was largely influenced by pagan, Gentile immorality. They preached the good news that human beings are far more than just the flesh. Many of those who listened to them were converts to Judaism. This leads to the second reason the Gospel is good news. Paul and Barnabas taught that religion, the search for God, is much more than following the rules of the Jewish Law. God desires a living and loving relationship with His children, which brings joy to the soul. By coming in the flesh, the Son of God shows us that to be truly human is to share in the life of God, in whose image we are made. As Christians, we know more than just a set of rules: we know the Lord Himself, and by knowing the Lord, we know ourselves as His children. This knowledge of God makes life in this world joyful, as we awaken to the beauty and goodness of God's presence all around us. We find life in this world much easier to face, and we find that it has meaning and purpose.

But life in this world still holds suffering, and eventually comes death. Now, here is the third reason the Gospel is good news: in Christ Jesus we have eternal life in His Kingdom. Life does not end with the death of our body; life is only fully realized in what comes next. In this life we are so confined by our bodies and minds, but in the life to come we are completely free, and we discover the fullness of life. As our reading from Revelation tells us, in our Heavenly home we will be with Jesus, and there will be no more tears, and no more pain.

I mentioned that our first reading is also about us. This is because just as Paul and Barnabas were sent to tell the good news to others, so are we. We are sent by Jesus as lights for the world: to bring hope, and joy, and dignity to human beings by living and sharing the Gospel. We go in the power of Jesus, guided and protected by His hand, and as He says in today's Gospel reading, there is no snatching from His hand, or from the hand of the Father. Please remember that I am asking all St. Barnabas parishioners to focus these days on prayer, faith formation, and Christian service. By doing so, we will come to know better our mission as disciples.

Fr. Roberts