

## **Excerpt from a sermon for Saint Barnabas' Day June 14, 2020 (transferred from June 11)**

Today we honor St Barnabas, the saint who was chosen as the Patron Saint of our church. St Barnabas wasn't one of the twelve disciples, but he was prominent in the early Church. He was a Levite from Cyprus, whose real name was Joseph. He was given the nickname *Barnabas* which means "son of encouragement" or "son of consolation." He was one of the first to submit to Jesus as Lord, and in the Acts of the Apostles we read that he sold a field which belonged to him and donated the money to the Church in Jerusalem.

Barnabas testified before the Church as to the sincerity of Paul's conversion and later became Paul's mission partner. Jesus, who encouraged his followers to go out in pairs, finds perhaps his two finest practitioners in Paul and Barnabas, and they converted many followers, including Gentiles, to the Christian life. Barnabas is described in the Acts of the Apostles as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

In our roll call of Christian saints we tend to focus on what I call the "rock stars" - people like St Paul, St Peter and later St Augustine and St Francis of Assisi. If we take Paul as an example, we have a large body of his writings which have shaped the theology of the Church, and he himself was tireless in preaching the gospel. We hear much less of St Barnabas, however, partly because nothing he wrote has survived, unless you count the Letter to the Hebrews. But where Barnabas went, there the Spirit of God went too. This great saint, filled with the Holy Spirit, had the knack of lighting the fire of faith in so many hearts and in so many places, and he no doubt influenced and fed the faith of his companion Paul as well.

God blesses those who are his laborers in the field. St Barnabas gave his life to Christ, even selling his most valuable possession to give to the Church. A good Levite, schooled in the law, he would have been aware of the need to give the best of what you have to the Lord rather than keeping it for yourself. There is an underlying sense of a person who knows the purpose and meaning of sacrifice, who offered their life as a sacrifice to God, and God welcomed Barnabas and gave back his life to him. And Barnabas said, "No, Lord, we are together."

Our Collect today distills the essence of this, our patron saint, when it describes him as “seeking not his own renown but the well-being of your Church, for he gave generously of his life and substance for the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel.” It would be impossible to measure the impact of St Barnabas on the life of the early Church, but it was significant. And we know enough about him to see how the divine call filled him with joy and gave his life meaning.

We too are called to this work of self sacrifice, of aiding the poor and of spreading the gospel. We are called to take up our cross and follow Jesus, to cast our care upon him and take on his yoke. There is no finer or more noble calling in this life. Encouraged by the example of St Barnabas, let us make that leap of faith and offer our own lives, fully and without condition, to the God of love.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Father David Beresford