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Meditations: June 11, Saint Barnabas

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of the apostle Saint Barnabas.

07/11/2023

- Saint Paul's co-workers
- An intense and fruitful life
- Diversity among the early Christians

WHEN READING the Acts of the Apostles, it is striking to see the large number of co-workers who assisted

Saint Paul on his apostolic journeys. The Apostle to the Gentiles always relied on others; he was open to working with others, without trying to do everything on his own. “Paul does not act as a ‘soloist,’ on his own, but together with these collaborators in the ‘we’ of the Church. This ‘I’ of Paul is not an isolated ‘I’ but an ‘I’ in the ‘we’ of the Church, in the ‘we’ of the apostolic faith.”^[1] —

Among his closest companions, a person who played a particularly important role was Saint Barnabas. A Jew from the tribe of Levi, a native of Cyprus, he was one of the first to embrace the faith in Jerusalem, after the resurrection of Jesus. To assist the needy, he sold a field he owned and gave the money to the apostles (cf. *Acts* 4:37). This great sign of generosity was not an isolated event, but something constant throughout his life.

When news reached Jerusalem of the warm reception the Gospel had received in Antioch of Syria, the apostles sent Barnabas there. *When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose* (Acts 11:23). Later, he went to Tarsus in search of Saul; when he found him, Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch. *Sent out by the Holy Spirit* (Acts 13:4), Barnabas and Saul worked together for a whole year to evangelize that important city; it was there that Christ's disciples were called "Christians" for the first time. Later, he accompanied Saint Paul on his first missionary journey, throughout Cyprus and Asia Minor in present-day Turkey (cf. Acts 13-14). Filled with courage (cf. Acts 13:46), they suffered many hardships in the service of our Lord. Thanks to their efforts, *the word of the Lord spread throughout all the region.*

BARNABAS is described in the Acts of the Apostles as *a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith* (Acts 11:24).

Throughout his life, from his first apostolic efforts until his death, he was a tireless witness to the Gospel. His apostolic zeal stemmed from the mandate of Christ in the Gospel passage we read on his feast day: *preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons . . . Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food* (Mt 10:7-10).

Barnabas worked intensely to spread the Gospel because he found the meaning of his life in his apostolic mission. He worked with complete generosity, as our Lord had asked his disciples to do: *You received without*

paying, give without pay (Mt 10:8). We see in the Acts of the Apostles how God blessed his efforts with abundant fruit. Thus, for example, thanks to his preaching in Antioch, *a large company was added to the Lord (Acts 11:24).* In the Collect prayer on his feast day, the liturgy addresses a plea to God to grant “that the Gospel of Christ, which he strenuously preached, may be faithfully proclaimed by word and by deed.”

Saint Josemaría wrote: “I will tell you what man’s treasures are on earth so you don’t waste them: hunger, thirst, heat, cold, pain, dishonor, poverty, loneliness, betrayal, slander, prison.”^[2] These treasures frequently accompanied the adventures of Paul and Barnabas in their evangelizing efforts.

“Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a

heroic individual undertaking . . . In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit . . . This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.”^[3]

PAUL AND BARNABAS had a disagreement at the beginning of their second missionary journey, because of Mark, a young Christian. Barnabas wanted to take him with him, but Paul refused, since Mark had abandoned them during the previous trip (cf. *Acts* 13:13; 15:36-40). Owing to this discord, their paths diverged. Barnabas, with Mark,

went to Cyprus (cf. *Acts* 15:39), while Paul continued his journey without them.

Disagreements can also arise among the saints. It is only natural that some have different opinions or views than others. “The saints have not ‘fallen from Heaven.’ They are people like us, who also have complicated problems. Holiness does not consist in never having erred or sinned. Holiness increases the capacity for conversion, for repentance, for willingness to start again and, especially, for reconciliation and forgiveness . . . it is not the fact that we have never erred but our capacity for reconciliation and forgiveness that makes us saints.”^[4] —

The atmosphere among the first Christians that Saint Barnabas experienced can be a model for us, since it shows us that the Gospel can

illumine lives that are very different one from another. Saint Josemaría learned a lesson from these first Christian communities. “The diversity that exists and will always exist among the members of Opus Dei is a sign of good spirit, of an honest life, of respect for the legitimate opinion of each one.”^[5] — We can ask God, through the intercession of our Lady, for the apostolic fervor of Saint Barnabas and for the grace we need to help enliven Christian environments as those first disciples did.

All Christians serve the Gospel relying on the gifts that God has granted us and according to our personal vocation. Our Heavenly Mother, Queen of Apostles, will help us to always be faithful to our calling. We ask her to never abandon us.

[1] Benedict XVI, Audience, 31 January 2007.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 194.

[3] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. no. 12.

[4] Benedict XVI, Audience, 31 January 2007.

[5] Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 38.

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