

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I can't imagine, at the end of one's life, any better way to be thought of than what we read about the Apostle Barnabas: "he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith." What more does a man need in life? We'll come back to the life of St. Barnabas in a moment.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus gave clear instructions to His disciples. Our preaching must be centered on the here-and-now presence of the kingdom of God, which should be most clearly manifest in the life and work of the Church. Our chapels should be so built and decorated as to give the one who walks in a kind of picture of heaven, and stir a longing in the soul for the presence of God. Our words and actions should be patterned after the words and actions of the saints, who themselves manifested the presence of the kingdom and of the King.

Whenever the Church has fallen on hard times—that means when she has become indolent and fat and complacent—God has mercifully raised up saints who have followed closely the instructions Our Lord gave to His seventy disciples. To show to all humankind the presence of the kingdom of God, the continuing presence of Christ in the world, we were to heal the sick, including those declared "unclean" because of their skin diseases or other illnesses, cast out demons and even raise the dead. The Acts of the Apostles shows the early Church doing all

these things. When St. Francis set about renewing the Church, he and his disciples were famous for repeating such signs, signs of the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe that in our day, as the Church recognizes its need for renewal, the Holy Spirit is raising up men and women to do that very thing. They will practice evangelical poverty, become signs of the presence of God through their good works and miracles, and attract many to Christ and His Church. History teaches us that God does not abandon the good work He began in the first century. No, He will raise up these new saints to astonish the world and become the vessels of His Word.

As the psalmist sings, “[God] has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.”

Our saint of the day must have been a giant in the early Church, but he appears only briefly in the Acts of the Apostles. His birth name was Joseph. He practiced the poverty encouraged by Jesus, and in fact is there named with a new name—Barnabas, “son of encouragement.” Sent to Antioch by the college of Apostles in Jerusalem, he oversaw a church of exponential growth, and so he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back as a master teacher. He and Paul worked there for a year, and then a charismatic oracle set them aside to do missionary work, which became Paul’s first missionary journey. This took them

through what we now know as Turkey–Asian Minor–where they established several churches that themselves became centers of missionary activity.

We can appreciate Barnabas in another way. He constantly showed himself to be as weak as we are in appreciating the depth and breadth of the Gospel. Two examples will suffice:

First, Barnabas had a deep affinity for his cousin, John Mark—who may have been the author of the Gospel of Mark. John Mark went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but it appears that Mark got homesick on the journey and went back to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas completed that missionary work and went back to Antioch. But when they planned their second mission, Barnabas wanted to recruit John Mark again, and Paul refused. Their missionary work then separated and we don't hear anything in Acts about Barnabas after that. So if Christians disagree about strategies and persons to work with, that may just be God working with our weaknesses to—as it is said—write straight with crooked lines.

Second, we read in Paul's letter to the Galatians that when the Judaizers went around telling Gentile Christians that they weren't real Christians without circumcision and the Jewish ritual laws, “even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.” But it's implied that he

eventually saw the light and began treating Gentile and Jew Christians equally. This suggests that we need spiritual counsel from time to time, because every Christian is challenged to an unique application of the Gospel to his own life and times, and doesn't always do it correctly when flying by his own flawed spiritual GPS. May God lead us to lead a life that gives good witness of the Christian faith to those around us.

Amen.