

May 4th, 2024 - Saturday of the 5th week of Easter

[Acts 16:1-10; John 15:18-21](#)

H O M I L Y

The readings that we have at Mass during this Paschal Season are exceptionally rich. On the one hand, we read, in the Gospel, Jesus' last recommendations to his disciples during the last meal that he ate with them, as they are narrated to us by John. On the other hand, the readings from the Acts of the Apostles give us a very lively picture of the primitive Church, where everything evolved at a very rapid pace. One of the aspects of that evolution, that I find the most fascinating, is the fact that the whole future of the Church was bound with the personal history of a few individuals. (Actually, it will be like this during the whole history of the Church). Throughout the whole Book of Acts, the central figure is obviously that of Paul; but I find still more fascinating, on many aspects, the figure of Barnabas, without whom Paul would have perhaps never been known.

Barnabas was one of the very first Jews converted by the Apostles, after the Resurrection, and one of the first to be part of the first Christian Community of Jerusalem. He sold the field that he owned and came to deposit the money at the feet of the Apostles (Acts 4,37). After Paul's conversion, when the Jews of Damas wanted to kill him, and when everyone in Jerusalem, where he had taken refuge, run away from him, it was Barnabas who had the insight and the courage to go and get Paul and to bring him to the Apostles. Without that initiative of Barnabas, we would perhaps never have heard about Paul.

An important part of Paul's ministry is the period when he and Barnabas worked together in strict collaboration. When the Apostles heard about the first conversions in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to see what was going on there, and after a first inspection of what was happening, Barnabas went to fetch Paul who had returned home at Tarsis. Barnabas, who was a Levite, and Paul, a former Pharisee, made a tremendous team. They are the two who, after several conversions of pagans, led to the convocation of the Council of Jerusalem - after which they returned to Antioch.

In the end, there was a misunderstanding between Paul and Barnabas about Mark, to whom the intransigent Paul did not forgive having abandoned them when they were in Pamphylia, and whom Barnabas, more understanding, wanted to bring with them again. They separated then, after a lively discussion. After that, Paul continued his ministry with Silas and Barnabas did likewise with Mark. And the Acts don't say anything anymore about Barnabas, because they were written

by an admirer and a disciple of Paul,

It is wonderful to see how God, in order to realize His work, not only uses men, but also makes use of their limits and their shortcomings, as well as of their qualities and virtues. It also seems to me that, as a whole, people are not sufficiently aware of the capital role that Barnabas with his special gift of “knower of men”, played in the early Church. He is the one who “saved”, so to say, not only Paul, but also Mark who later gave us the first version of the Gospels.

Let us give thanks to the Lord for that wonderful story.