

Reading for Weekday in the Fourth Week of Eastertide

Also the Memorial of St George (England)

23rd April 2024

1st Reading: Acts 11:19-26

Barnabas goes to Antioch and sees the grace of God at work

Those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians."

Responsorial: Psalm 86: 1-7

R./: All you nations, praise the Lord.

On the holy mountain is his city
cherished by the Lord.
The Lord prefers the gates of Zion
to all Jacob's dwellings.
Of you are told glorious things,
O city of God! (R./)

'Babylon and Egypt I will count
among those who know me;
Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia,
these will be her children
and Zion shall be called "Mother"
for all shall be her children.' (R./)

It is he, the Lord Most High,
who gives each his place.
In his register of peoples he writes:
'These are her children'
and while they dance they will sing:
'In you all find their home.' (R./)

Gospel: John 10:22-30

Jesus shows himself as the Saviour in whom we must trust

At that time the festival of the Dedication was being celebrated in Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Short reflection on the readings for today

The initiative for faithful discipleship must come from God, as a gift of grace. "I give them eternal life", said Jesus, "and no one will snatch them out of my hand." He spoke of our eternal future while teaching in the precincts of the Temple. Somebody asked him: "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, say so in plain words." Many rejected his mystical words about the Kingdom of God, and demanded a plain answer, Yes or No, to the question, "Are you the Messiah?" What they probably meant was, "If you really are the Messiah, then we can begin our revolt against Rome."

God can brighten our lives if only we take time to be perceptive. This quality characterized Barnabas, a Christian from Cyprus who even in his lifetime was virtually canonized by his friends as "a good man filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith." His name is elsewhere interpreted as "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Originally named Joseph, he was nicknamed *Barnabas* because of his encouraging style and supportive personality.

The openness of Barnabas to God's gifts led him to Tarsus to search for Paul and persuade him to join the church in Antioch. Without this intervention, Paul, who had been virtually banished home to Tarsus, might have been lost in the silence of history. Like Jesus the Good Shepherd, Barnabas went out in search of Paul, and led him back into a community where he transformed the whole missionary energy of the church. We need to wonder how we too might be instrumental in helping others to find their proper role, their potential and the service they can give to the people of God.

Safe in his hands: Jesus refers to breaking in and stealing; and promises that no one will ever steal his followers from him. Because we worry about burglary and fear that others might steal from us or do us harm, we take security precautions to prevent that from happening. But the Lord has such a firm grip on us that no one will ever take us from him against his will. He wants us close to him and keep us from falling away.

But we also need to be proactive as his followers, for he says, "The sheep that belong to me *listen to my voice.*" We are meant to heed his words and follow his lead. If we do that, he will do the rest. Our salvation is the Lord's doing more than our own; but we must work with the grace of God and pay heed to his words.