

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jun 11th 2016

Memorial of Saint Barnabas, Apostle

I have to admit to a soft spot in my heart for St. Barnabas. (I even considered naming a son after him until I realized that a name like “Barney Carney” would not earn friends in middle school.) I especially love today’s passage. Barnabas – the “son of encouragement” – emerges as an ideal disciple. Faithful, joyful, and strong, Barnabas was “a good man filled with the Holy Spirit and faith,” a man who embodied Jesus’s guidance that your “yes” mean “yes” and your “no” mean “no.” It is Barnabas’s community in Antioch that first garners the name “Christian,” in part because his community included people as diverse as two North Africans, a former persecutor, and a friend of Herod! This motley crew of fellow travelers on “the Way” crossed so many ethnic, political and social lines that observers had to make up a new name for them: “Christians.”

I am writing this reflection in Tanzania on the Feast of Corpus Christi. Accompanying a Eucharistic procession this morning, I was reminded that Barnabas’s legacy – the spirit of Antioch – continues to thrive nearly 2,000 years later. Hundreds of Tanzanians accompanied the Eucharist on a mile-long “way” across a university campus here in Mwanza. Dozens of choir members sang, primary school girls danced in white dresses, sisters and priests chanted, and hundreds of laity walked through the dusty streets....all to celebrate the abiding presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The words of today’s Psalm 98 came alive under the equatorial sun. “All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation by our God. Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you lands; break into song; sing praise.” Alleluia.

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