

The Heart of a Pastor

Acts 11:19-13; 13:1-3

Introduction

Today, we celebrate the festival of St. Barnabas. Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. Originally named Joseph, the apostles gave him the name Barnabas, which means “Son of encouragement”, because he was known for his generosity and support. In **Acts 4**, we read how he sold a field and *laid [the money] at the apostles’ feet (Acts 4:36-37)*. When Saul came to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion, the disciples thought it was a trick and were afraid of him. Barnabas brought him to the apostles and vouched for him (**Acts 9:26-27**). While he is best known for being Paul’s first missionary partner, today’s reading focuses on events that happened before that.

Full of the Holy Spirit and of Faith

Verse 24 tells us that Barnabas’ actions were because he was *a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith (Acts 11:24)*. What qualities did he have that showed he was that sort of a man? It’s clear that Barnabas had the respect of the apostles. We can see that he had a good standing in the church. While not an apostle himself, he was at least a leader in the fledgling church. And whether he had the office or not, he had the heart of a pastor.

He Was Obedient

The first thing we see is that Barnabas was obedient. That is, he was willing, willing to go wherever he was needed and willing to do whatever was needed. A pastor’s not someone who just preaches sermons, administers the Sacraments, and teaches. He must be willing to “get his hands dirty” and do whatever needs to be done. The best way to lead is from the front. As a leader in the church, a pastor cannot ask someone else to do something he wouldn’t do himself.

He Saw the Big Picture

Barnabas had a clear vision. He saw what was important in life. When he saw how God had been working in Antioch, *he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose (Acts 11:23)*. He knew that whatever they were going through wasn’t what was important. Charles Stanley said, *Life is 5% what happens to us and 95% how we respond to it*. We can’t control what happens, but we can control how we will respond. No matter what’s going on in our life, whether good or bad, the only thing we can and need to do is remain faithful to the Lord.

He Knew His Limitations

When **Dirty Harry** came out, “Make my day” was on many T-shirts. Two years later, Clint Eastwood had a line in another Dirty Harry movie, **Magnum Force** that I liked. “Man’s got to know his limitations.” It’s true, if you don’t know your limits, you will either always underachieve because you’re afraid to push yourself or cause problems for everyone, biting off more than you can chew. When the church started growing in Antioch, Barnabas went off to find and bring back Saul to help him in the ministry. I may be the sole pastor here, but I still have the Board of Elders to share the ministry load with me.

He Was Trustworthy

One might think this should go without saying. Barnabas was trustworthy. They chose Barnabas and Saul to carry the relief offering to Jerusalem (**Acts 11:30**). Any Christian should be able to be trusted with money, shouldn't they? Yes, every Christian should be trustworthy. But when it comes down to it, every one of these qualities we have been talking about today are not just for pastors, but every Christian. Every Christian should be willing to do whatever, be able to focus on what matters, remain faithful, know his or her limitations, and be trustworthy. You see, pastors aren't that different from everyone else, just called and trained.

At the Table

When we come to the Lord's Table, we're the same as well. As I receive the body and blood of Jesus, I receive it as a man, not as a pastor. I am a fallen, forgiven human being, just like everyone else at the Table. You could say that Barnabas had a pastor's heart. But it would be more accurate to say that he had a Christian's heart. As we hear the Word and gather at the Table, let us pray that God would instill into each of us the heart Barnabas had, then see how He works through us.

*And the Peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
