

Saint of the Month for June 2014

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Barnabas, Apostle
Wednesday, June 11

Saint Barnabas is one of the few followers of Jesus considered by the Church to be an Apostle beyond the 12 chosen directly by Jesus: these also include St. Paul and St. Matthias, chosen to replace Judas Iscariot.

Barnabas was born Joseph (or Joses), a Jew and a Levite, on the island of Cyprus, and appears multiple times in the *Acts of the Apostles*. He became a believer in Jesus, and was part of the growing community of believers in “The Way” (the early name for Christians) in Jerusalem. He owned some land and sold it, and gave the proceeds to the Apostles in Jerusalem as was done multiple times in the very early church, when much was held in common. (*Acts*, chapter 4) The other Apostles heard about the great number of people turning to the Lord in Antioch (now Antakya, Turkey), and they sent Barnabas there (he had been a founder of that church, along with other Cypriots). He “encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart, for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and faith.” (*Acts* 11)

He then went to Tarsus and brought the recently-converted Paul (Saul) to Antioch, and vouched for him as being genuine. (Paul grew up in Tarsus, and had returned there after his conversion on the road to Damascus and some early preaching- some opponents had tried to kill him, so he went back to his home town.) Paul was certainly a “hot potato” for quite a while after his conversion- not many people could believe he had become a real follower of Jesus, rather than a kind of spy still actually up to his intense persecutions of earlier days. The two stayed a year in Antioch and taught many people; “it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians.” (*Acts* 11)

His new name, Barnabas, was given him because of his devotion- the word could mean “son of encouragement” or “son of consolation.” The phrase “son of” was a Semitic expression meaning “with an aptitude for.”

(He was one of the close companions of Saint Paul, who also included Silas, John Mark, Timothy, and Titus; not all were with Paul at a given moment, however.)

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Barnabas and Paul were chosen for a missionary trip to Asia Minor (now Turkey). (This is usually called St. Paul’s first missionary journey.) John Mark joined them for a while, but left part way through the mission, after arguments about circumcision and other things. Later Paul refused to preach along with Barnabas because of this argument. I think Paul was a tough man to get along with, being ever so strong-willed, and not everyone agreed with him or got along with him, even when they were devoted to the same goals!

Barnabas continued to preach the Gospel, and suffered a martyr’s death during Nero’s reign as Roman emperor, probably before the year 63. He probably died in Salamis in his native Cyprus.

His name appears in the Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer I), one of a short list of apostles, early popes, and early martyrs.

The main source for information about Barnabas is the *Acts of the Apostles*, but there are brief notes about him in a few of Paul's letters. We don't have any writings of Barnabas that are considered canonical, but some have been attributed to him. Some traditions have him in Alexandria, Egypt, and ascribe to him the *Letter of Barnabas* (not canonical), while others have him in Rome and being the author of *Letter to the Hebrews* (canonical). Neither tradition is official.

The celebration is given the rank of Obligatory Memorial. (**Magnificat**, June 2014; **Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Butler's Lives of the Saints, 2nd Edition** (Ave Maria Press); **Encyclopædia Britannica**, 15th Edition; **Jerusalem Bible**)

Collect from the Mass of Saint Barnabas:

O God, who decreed that Saint Barnabas,
a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit,
should be set apart to convert the nations,
grant that the Gospel of Christ,
which he strenuously preached,
may be faithfully proclaimed by word and by deed.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

St. Barnabas was devoted to Jesus, and tried to follow in his footsteps; his arguments with St. Paul should not diminish the honor we give him as a friend of God. He is considered the patron saint of quarrels (quarrel resolution) because of the way he resolved the dispute with Paul, taking John Mark under his wing. Saint Barnabas, pray for us!