

Fourth Sunday of Easter – I have made you a light for nations



Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Sit and relax by focussing on your breathing for a few minutes so that you can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

Prayer

Acknowledge you are in the presence of God by saying the following prayer:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit. Amen

Let the Spirit guide our hearts and enlighten our minds to the graces we need in order to share our faith with others.

Reading Acts 13:14.43-52

Paul and Barnabas carried on from Perga till they reached Antioch in Pisidia. Here they went to synagogue on the sabbath and took their seats. When the meeting broke up, many Jews and devout converts joined Paul and Barnabas, and in their talks with them Paul and Barnabas urged them to remain faithful to the grace God had given them.

The next sabbath almost the whole town assembled to hear then word of God. When they saw the crowds, the Jews, prompted by jealousy, used blasphemies and contradicted everything Paul said.

Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly. "We had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, we must turn to the pagans. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when he said:

"I have made you a light for the nations,
so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth."

It made the pagans very happy to hear this and they thanked the Lord for his message; all who were destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread through the whole countryside.

But the Jews worked upon some of the devout women of the upper classes and the leading men of the city and persuaded them to turn against Paul and Barnabas and expel them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in defiance and went off to Iconium; but the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Contemplation

In the first reading of the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we follow the growth of the early church and in this Scripture reading, we are introduced to Paul and Barnabas who, like Peter and the Apostles in last week's reading, are boldly and publicly proclaiming the Word of God. Enter into the assembly of people on the Sabbath and watch the story unfold.

- Who are you in this scene? Paul? Barnabas? One of the Jews? One of the Gentiles? One of those assembled to hear Paul and Barnabas? One of the devout citizens whose mind the Jew tried to poison?
- Were you one of those in the synagogue when the Jews and converts met with Paul and Barnabas? What do you think they meant when they urged you to remain faithful to the grace God had given them? What are the gifts and graces God has given to you?
- What effect did Paul and Barnabas have on you? Did they leave you hungry to hear more? Is this why you returned the following week to hear them proclaim the word of God? What was it about them that made you listen? Were they speaking boldly with conviction and courage?
- What is the atmosphere like? One of enthusiasm? One of hostility and jealousy?
- Why do you think that Paul and Barnabas stirred up jealousy in some of the Jews? Why do you think they were contradicting Paul and Barnabas? Do you think it was because they thought that the Word of God was only meant for them? Do you feel too that God's message is only meant for an exclusive group or do you think it is for everyone? Have you ever judged someone for their beliefs and behaviours?
- Why were the Jews enraged when Paul and Barnabas said "We had to proclaim the word of God to you first, but since you have rejected it, since you do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life, we must turn to the pagans. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do when he said:
"I have made you a light for the nations,
so that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth."
Do you too feel you are called to be a light to others? Recall how you are a light to those you encounter in the community. Does your presence and being a light to others lead to a spirit of joy and thankfulness as with the gentiles? How does the word of

God spread through the countryside in the community you live in?

- What was it in the message of the Gospel that stirred up such violence and confrontation? Does this make you feel disheartened because the Gospel message is one of love and peace? Or are you like Paul and Barnabus, filled with joy and the Holy Spirit because you are proclaiming a message of love and peace? Or like one of the gentiles who went away thanking God that they were not excluded from His message?

Speak to the Risen Christ about how you feel and the words of encouragement you would like to hear from him? Ask him for the courage and enthusiasm to be able to share your faith with others and not be disheartened by opposition.

End Prayer Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.