

Fifth Sunday of Easter – They put fresh heart into the disciples

The missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas



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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 14:21-27

Paul and Barnabas went back through Lystra and Iconium to Antioch. They put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. "We all have to experience many hardships" they said "before we enter the kingdom of God." In each of these churches they appointed elders, and with prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

They passed through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. Then after proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia and from there sailed for Antioch, where they had originally been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On their arrival they assembled the church and gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the pagans.

Contemplation

In the first reading of the Fifth Sunday of Easter, we follow the growth of the early church especially Paul and Barnabas as they continue their missionary journey spreading the good news of the Gospel. Enter into the scene and listen to Paul and Barnabas as they give encouragement to those who have come to believe and spread the good news of salvation.

- Who are you in this scene? Paul? Barnabas? One of the disciples into whom Paul and Barnabas has put fresh heart? One of the elders they have appointed? One of the church assembly in Antioch to whom they gave an account of their progress? Are you a witness to the growth of the church?

- As you listen to Paul and Barnabas, how have they put fresh heart into you? What encouragement have they given you that makes you want to persevere in faith? Can you recall a time when someone has put fresh heart into you when your journey was difficult? Or a time when someone has encouraged you when times have been hard? Does the fact that they admit to the hardships they have experienced on their journey discourage you from your missionary journey or does it motivate you?
- Perhaps you have been appointed as an elder of the church. How does that make you feel? What gifts do you feel you can bring to this community of believers? Does prayer and fasting help you commend yourself to the Lord in whom you have come to believe?
- Perhaps you are part of the church community with whom Paul and Barnabas share an account of all the work God has enabled them to do. Are you encouraged by their achievements? Do you realise it is only by the grace of God that has enabled them to spread the Gospel of Christ to such a large number of people?
- Are you prepared to open the doors to enable the word of God reach others in your community? Are you prepared to travel to spread the Word of God? Perhaps you may not want to travel as far as Paul and Barnabas. Can you think of ways you can spread the Word of God closer to home?
- Do you feel motivated to become a missionary disciple? How do you feel about making your journey into the wider world so that the good news is available to everyone?

Speak to the Risen Christ about how you feel and the words of encouragement you would like to hear from him. Speak to him about the areas of your life that need reinvigorating and what it means to be a missionary disciple.

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.