

St Barnabas 12th June 2016

Yesterday was St. Barnabas' Day. He doesn't feature very highly in most peoples' lists of saints and may be considered a little obscure, but really he is one of those "attainable" saints whose example is within all our reaches and has much to teach us about daily living.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Barnabas is described as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit".

Perhaps there is no word that needs rehabilitation more than "good". Goodness doesn't hit the headlines or sell papers, and indeed the way we use the word today can often be a bit patronising. If we can't think of anything positive to say about a person, we say 'he or she is a good person.... really!'

But the example Barnabas sets us of goodness is far from bland but is solid, dependable, thoughtful and sturdy.

We first meet Barnabas in the Acts of the Apostles. He was not one of the 12 disciples. He was a native of Cyprus and like countless other Jews he had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. It was to be a decisive visit for it was in that year that the Holy Spirit first fell on the disciples and they were given the courage to leave their hiding places and go out publicly to preach the Gospel. Barnabas was among those who heard and believed.

The 1st Christians had among them those who were poor as well as rich, those who had been cut off from friends and family because they embraced a new found faith in Jesus. So the early church pooled their resources and we read that Barnabas who owned property in Cyprus sold what he had and brought the proceeds to the Apostles to help those in need.

Barnabas was a good man, a generous man, a man who put his money where his mouth was.

Now the name Barnabas means 'An Encourager' and the next two times we come across him we find him doing just that.

When Paul, the persecutor of the early Christians, became a Christian himself, everyone was suspicious and found it hard to believe. Was it just a cunning plan to arrest more believers? Could the leopard really change his spots? But Barnabas stood up for Paul and spoke up for Paul, vouching for the reality of his conversion and the sincerity of his faith in Jesus. Paul could have been lost to the early church if it hadn't been for Barnabas.

An encourager, a person who saw the best rather than the worst in others.

And this was certainly the case with regard to Mark, the writer of the 1st Gospel. As a young man, probably too young, Paul and Barnabas took him with them on the first missionary journey. But very early into that trip Mark got cold feet and wanted to return home. Paul was disgusted and would have nothing more to do with Mark whom he called a 'quitter'. But Barnabas saw Mark's qualities and stuck with him, and gave Mark another chance, even if it meant falling out with Paul. And Barnabas' confidence in Mark was gloriously justified for Mark became the helper of St. Peter, the writer of the 1st Gospel and in the end was reconciled to Paul.

Barnabas the encourager had that wonderful ability to help people achieve their full potential, he had that wonderful way of helping people to have confidence in themselves.

And this weekend we not only think of the example we have been left by Barnabas but also by Queen Elizabeth whose example of faithfulness, of dedication of duty, of perseverance we all greatly admire. She has been a unifying force in the nation and in the commonwealth, and has made no secret that all she does is underpinned and girded by an active Christian faith.

In her Christmas speech in 2014 she said:

'For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none.'

She has been and is a good monarch and true example of the importance of having the Christian faith as an anchor to our lives.

We join with all those who celebrate her birthday and long life of service to society and the church and pray for her continued health and happiness.