

### St Barnabas: Apostle and Martyr



If you have been reading the Acts of the Apostles lately, you will have noticed an early Christian called Barnabas. Actually, his full name is Joseph Barnabas—and the Bar in his last name means “Son of”—so his name would actually be Joseph son of Nabus—but let’s just call him Barnabas—since that is what he is called in the Acts of the Apostles.

Barnabas was one of the first Christians in the Church. When the apostles gathered many of the early Christians into a central living area, Barnabas was one who sold his house, and brought the money from the sale, and gave it all to the Apostles. He was nicknamed, the “son of consolation” since he was a good listener and supported and encouraged many of the early Christians.

Though Barnabas came from Cyprus, he was a Jewish Levite and an uncle of St. Paul. Earlier, it was St. Barnabas who had gone to Tarsus, and brought him to Antioch to join the work of evangelizing gentiles there. And that is how we find him later in Jerusalem. It was Barnabas who convinced the Apostles to invite Paul down to Jerusalem to discuss the evangelism of Gentile Christians. You see, some Christians from Jerusalem were concerned about whether gentiles could be baptised, which Paul had been doing, so much so that the Church in Antioch was becoming dominated by gentile Christians. Was that possible, they asked? And it was Barnabas who quietly and successfully introduced Paul to the Apostles. The result was the First Church Council which approved the baptism of gentiles. Just as well, because it opened the doors to world evangelism and the worldwide spread of the Church. So, in a way, St. Barnabas was a founder of the worldwide Church, and is responsible for us as Christians—you see we all are gentiles.

St. Barnabas then returned with Paul to Antioch, where they were both successful in evangelizing gentiles. As the scriptures say: “... Barnabas was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit...” It was in Antioch that St. Barnabas conceived of the idea of a Missionary Journey. The first Missionary Journey was not led by St. Paul, but by St. Barnabas, and Paul came along as the assistant. You have perhaps been taught about the 4 Missionary Journeys of St. Paul—but the first one was in fact led by St. Barnabas, with St. Paul as assistant and John Mark along as a learner.

Part way through that First Missionary Journey, John Mark left and headed back home. He was probably in his early twenties and was rather out of his depth. However, St. Paul was so irritated that when the 2nd Missionary Journey was being planned, he refused to take John Mark, and instead took Silas. St. Barnabas took John Mark and headed off on his own Missionary Journey. Again, we notice that St. Barnabas was the one who supported and encouraged John Mark as he had supported and encouraged St. Paul just a few years before. That was the kind of person St. Barnabas was—a quiet enabler,

supporter of others who needed that boost of confidence. Because of this support in his early years, John Mark went on to become the first writer of a Gospel, the Gospel of St. Mark, written between 62 and 64 AD, from the city of Rome.

St. Barnabas was martyred in Salamis in 61AD. He died as he lived, a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ, but not before he had helped so many in the Faith, enabling the Church to grow. His example gave strength to the early Church.

Much would not have happened in the early Church without the strong support and encouragement of St. Barnabas. He is an example of encouragement to us today. I can think of people who have been a Barnabas to me—can you think of someone who has been a Barnabas to you in your Christian growth?

Better still, can you remember a time when you have been a Barnabas to someone else? Can you think of those whom you have encouraged and supported in their spiritual growth—brothers and sisters who might have fallen by the wayside if you had not quietly but firmly carried them, encouraged them, prayed with them, witnessed to them, loved them until they were ready to stand firm in their Christian Faith?

St. Barnabas was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit. God grant that each of us can be a Barnabas to someone else.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen