

81// THE LIFE OF ST. BARNABAS THE APOSTLE

St. Barnabas was a deacon, and was born in Cyprus, and was one of the seventy-two disciples of our Lord, and is greatly praised in the history of the Acts of the Apostles of many good things that were in him, for he was right well informed and ordinate, as well to himself as to God and to his neighbour.

WELL ORDINATE IN HIMSELF

He was well ordinate in himself after three virtues that be in the soul, that is to say reason, desire, and strength

REASON

He had reason illumined with the clearness of very knowledge, hereof is said in the Acts of the Apostles, the thirteenth chapter. It is said that there were in the church of Antioch doctors, prophets and great masters in holy scripture among whom were Barnabas, Simon, and many other great clerks, yet had he desire well ordinate and expurged them from the dust of all worldly affection, and thereof is found in the Acts of Apostles the fourth chapter, that he sold a field that he had, and the value and price thereof he laid at the feet of the apostles.

DESIRE

And the gloss saith: St. Barnabas showed to us herein that we ought leave the things that men should not put thereon their desire ne their heart, and taught us to despise gold and silver, by that that he laid the silver at the feet of the apostles.

Barnabas is as much to say as the son of him that cometh, or the son of consolation, or the son of a prophet, or a son concluding. He is four times said a son by four manners of expositions, he is said son in scripture by reason of generation, of erudition, of imitation, and of adoption. He was regenerate of Jesu Christ by baptism, and he was taught by the gospel and followed him by martyrdom, and adopted by heavenly reward, and this was touching himself.

As touching others he was coming, comforting, prophesying and concluding. Coming, in running and preaching over all, and that appeareth for he was fellow of St. Paul. Comforting poor people and desolate, to poor people in giving alms, to desolate in sending epistles in the name of the apostles. Prophesying for he flowered by the spirit of prophecy. In concluding, for he concluded a great multitude of people and converted them to the faith, as it appeareth when he was sent to Antioch. And that saith the book called the Acts of the Apostles.

As to the first he was a man and manly, to the second good; as to the third, full of the Holy Ghost, and as to the fourth, true. His passion Bede compiled out of Greek into Latin.

STRENGTH

Yet had he the virtue of the soul which is called strength, well affirmed with prowess of patience, and that may we see on the great things and high that he emprised, and on the great penances that he did, and on the great torments and pains that he suffered.

Great things then he emprised, and that may we see when he took upon him to convert so great a city as was Antioch. For when St. Paul came into Jerusalem anon after his conversion, and would accompany him with the disciples, they fled all away, like sheep do from wolves, but Barnabas went anon to him, and took and brought him in to the company of the apostles.

After, he enforced his body with great penances that he did, for he tormented it with aspre and hard fastings, yet was St. Barnabas a man enforced to suffer pains and torments; for he and St. Paul abandoned their lives overall for the love of our Lord Jesu Christ.

WELL ORDINATE AS TOUCHING TO GOD

Secondly, he was ordained as touching to God in bearing [and] authority, majesty, and bounty.

BEARING AND AUTHORITY

He bare honour and reverence unto the great authority of God, after that we find in the Acts of the Apostles the thirteenth chapter, when the Holy Ghost said: Take ye to me apart, Barnabas and Paul, for to do the office that I have chosen them to.

MAJESTY

Yet St. Barnabas bare honour to the great majesty of God, for when there should be done reverence to him and sacrifice as to a God, and was called Jupiter as he that went before, and they called Paul, Mercury, as a fair and wise speaker. Anon Barnabas and Paul rent and tare their coats, and cried all on high: Ye people, what do ye? We be mortal as ye be, which warn you to turn and convert to the very God living, Jesu Christ.

BOUNTY

After, St. Barnabas bare reverence to the bounty of God, after that is found in the Acts of Apostles the fifteenth chapter. Some converts of the Jews would minish the bounty of the grace of God, and said that this grace that our Lord had done in his passion sufficed not to save us without circumcision. Against this error St. Paul and Barnabas withstood vigorously, and showed to them appertly that the grace and bounty that God hath done is sufficient, without the law, to our salvation. After they sent to the apostles this question, the which they sent anon through the world in epistles against this foolish error.

WELL ORDINATE AS TOUCHING TO HIS NEIGHBOUR

After, St. Barnabas was right strongly well ordained against his neighbours, for all them that were committed to his cure he nourished and fed, in word, in example and in benefits.

IN WORD

In word, for he pronounced to them the holy word of God and the gospel. Hereof is said in the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul and Barnabas abode in Antioch preaching the word of God. That may be seen by the great multitude of people that he converted in the city of Antioch, for they converted so much people there, that the disciples lost their special name and were called Christian men as the other.

IN ENSAMPLE

Yet nourished he them that he had charge of by good ensample, for his life was to all them that saw him as a mirror of holiness and the exemplar of all religion. For he was in all his works noble and hardy, and well embellished of all good works, and was full of the Holy Ghost, and enlumined and light in the faith of our Lord.

IN BENEFITS

All these four things be touched of him in the Acts of the Apostles, and yet nourisheth he them by benefits in two manners, that is in alms temporal, in administering to the poor their necessity, and in other alms spiritual, in forgiving all rancour and evil will.

Alms Temporal

The first alms did St. Barnabas, for he bare to such as were in right great poverty and misery, that as was needful for them to live, for after that we find in the Acts of the Apostles, there was a great famine in the time of Claudius the emperor, which famine had Agabus prophesied, and because the disciples that would return to their brethren into Judea, sent unto the most ancient their alms by the hands of Barnabas and Paul.

Alms Spiritual

The second alms did St. Barnabas when he pardoned his anger to John, surnamed Mark. For when the said John, which was one of the disciples, was departed from the company of Barnabas and of Paul, he repented him, and would return to them, and Barnabas forgave it him and took him again to his disciple, but Paul would not receive him with him; nevertheless that which was done between them both was by good intention, for in this that Barnabas took him again, we may see the sweetness of his pity, and in this that St. Paul would not receive him, is showed the great savour of right that was in him, after that the gloss saith, Acts xv., because this John had been tofore the master of the law to defend the law of Jesu Christ, and had not contained him vigorously for to repress them, but had been negligent. For this reason St. Paul would not accord to receive him in to the company of the other.

Nevertheless this departing that John was thus departed from the company of St. Paul and from the other, was for no vice that was in him, but for the sharpness and inspiring of the Holy Ghost, to the end that they might preach in divers places; after that it happed after. For when Barnabas was on a time in the city of Iconium, a man with a clear shining visage appeared by night to this John aforesaid, his cousin, and said to him thus: John, have in thee no doubtance, but be strong and vigorous, for from henceforth thou shalt no more be called John, but thou shalt be called right high enhanced.

And when he had told this to his cousin St. Barnabas, he answered and said to him: Keep thee well that thou tell this vision to no man, for in the same form he appeared to me that night after.

BARNABAS IN CYPRUS

When St. Barnabas and St. Paul had long preached in the city of Antioch, the angel of God appeared to St. Paul and said to him: Go hastily in to Jerusalem, for thou shalt find there some of the brethren that abide thee. Then Barnabas would go in to Cyprus to visit his friends and kin that were there, and St. Paul would go to Jerusalem; thus departed that one from that other by enticement of the Holy Ghost, that so had ordained it.

And when St. Paul had showed to St. Barnabas this that the angel said, St. Barnabas answered to him: The will of God be done like as he hath ordained it. I go now into Cyprus, and more hereafter shall I not see thee, for there shall I end my life.

Then he humbly kneeled down and fell to his feet weeping, and St. Paul, which had compassion of him, said unto him these words by consolation: Barnabas, weep no more, for our Lord will that it be so, our Lord hath appeared to me this night, and hath said to me: Let not ne give none empeshment to Barnabas for to go into Cyprus, for he shall there enlumine many folk and shall suffer there martyrdom.

On a time that Barnabas and John issued out of Cyprus and found an enchanter named Elymas, which by his enchantment had taken away the sight from some and after given it to them again, he was much contrary to them and would not suffer them enter into the temple. After this, Barnabas saw on a day men and women, being all naked, running through the town, and made then great feast, whereof he was much angry and gave his malediction and curse to the temple, and suddenly a great part thereof fell down and slew a great part of the people.

HIS MARTYRDOM

At the last St. Barnabas came into the city of Salome, but this enchanter aforesaid moved the people greatly against him, so much that the Jews came and took him and led him through the city with great shame, and would have delivered him to the judge of the city for to punish him and to put him to death. But when they heard say that a great and a puissant man was come in to the city, which was named Euseblus, and was of the lineage of the emperor Nero, the Jews had doubt that he would take him out of their hands and let him go, and therefore anon they bound a cord about his neck, and drew him out of the city, and there anon burnt him, but yet the

felon Jews were not satisfied to martyr him so, for they took the bones of him and put them in a vessel of lead, and would have cast them into the sea, but John, his disciple, with two other of his disciples went by night into the place and took the holy bones and buried them in an holy place.

Then, after that Sigbert saith, they abode in that place unto the time of the emperor Zeno and Gelasius the pope, that was the year of our Lord five hundred. After that then, as St. Dorotheus said, they were found by the revelation of St. Barnabas himself, and were from thence translated in to another place, and St. Dorotheus saith thus: Barnabas preached first at Rome of Christ. and was made bishop of Milan.

The [iconography of Saint Barnabas](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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