

My dear Friends

The Camino remains closed, pilgrims and Chaplains remain frustrated and with continued uncertainty, the future remains unknown to us. Had things been different, I was going to share some thoughts on the 'Feast of Corpus Christi' – otherwise known as the 'Thanksgiving for the Institution of the Holy Communion' which falls in a day or so from now, but as so many are currently unable to receive the Sacrament, I'm looking elsewhere, to another festival set for this Thursday.

Our lifelong pilgrimage into the unknown continues, and thankfully we have the God who loves us alongside us. It is a strange time as we await clearer news. But we journey on and it is good to remember this week one of my favourite saints – the one who was a Camino companion to and encouraged others – whose feast day falls this Thursday.

### **The Feast of St Barnabas - 11th June**

William Barclay referred to Barnabas as "The man with the biggest heart in the Church" - surely a true compliment. Luke, (who more than likely would have known Barnabas) in his turn calls him "A good man" - not an over-the-top compliment, but he calls no-one else this, so that indicates how his contemporaries viewed him.

Another compliment, from those who knew him personally, was his name. His family named him Joseph, but his friends called him Barnabas which translates as 'Son of Consolation', which indicates his big-hearted nature of care for others.

He was a Levite whose family had moved to Cyprus where he was born and where he eventually returned to establish the Christian Church there. At the time of Acts he was initially 'amongst the Levites' working at the Jerusalem temple.

We first hear of him in scripture when he, like many others sold some property (a field) and gave the proceeds to support the apostles' cause of work and mission. He was one of many who did so, but it enables Luke to introduce us to a man who would be prominent in being with Paul in his work.

Barnabas was a man of action - he was willing to preach, and willing also to travel in order to spread the message, with all the planning, strategy, risk taking that was involved (and if you've walked the Camino, you'll know how involved planning an uncertain journey can be). He was willing to 'put his head over the pulpit' -as we say, and to enter into dialogue with those he met.

Barnabas was concerned for people - he involves himself with Paul. After Paul's road to Damascus experience and dramatic conversion, he eventually goes to join the apostles, but word about him and his history of persecution of the Jews mean that he is given a cool reception. But Barnabas takes the risk of supporting and

trusting him and encourages the others to do likewise. I wonder if without Barnabas would Paul have become so important to us?

Later, in Acts, we again find Barnabas giving the benefit of the doubt - this time to John Mark, possibly the writer of the gospel of Mark. You'll recall that Paul felt that the young man had let them down on one mission, and would not take him on his next journey, but Barnabas takes him on and we find subsequent missionary trips pairing Paul with Silas, and Barnabas with John Mark follow. Later Paul is complementary at John Mark's success, so Barnabas's trust has again paid off.

And Barnabas continues to encourage Paul and the others. He is sent to Antioch to follow up a call for mission, and then fetches Paul and they work there together for a year.



**'Saints Paul and Barnabas at Lystra' - Bartholomeus Breenberg**

And so, through this introduction Paul's ministry grows, and again I ask, 'would Paul's stature have grown, and his historical importance if it was not for Barnabas'.

Soon, instead of reading of 'Barnabas and Paul', we read of 'Paul and Barnabas' - and then of 'Paul and his followers' - but we sense that the biggest heart in the church would not be jealous, but pleased that he had seen the potential and it had been realised.

Scripture tells us no more of him, but chapters 4-15 of Acts probably tell us enough.



**'Barnabas curing the sick'  
Paolo Veronese**

The world needs more like Barnabas; more folk generous in their giving of support to the underdog; more folk active in their faith and prepared to roll up their sleeves and get stuck in; more willing to support what they see as good and to look for the good where it is not so apparent - to give the benefit of the doubt; those who do not put themselves first but seek to promote the bigger picture. We can all do that - we can all be like Barnabas - sons and daughters of consolation - sons and daughters of encouragement, so we pray the collect for Barnabas:-

*Grant, O God, that we may follow the example of your faithful servant Barnabas, who, seeking not his own renown but the wellbeing of your Church, gave generously of his life and substance for the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

### **A Time of Prayer**

*At this time of continued uncertainty, we pray for so much, but in particular for our Camino Chaplains as they offer their thoughts and deliberations here over the weeks to come. We pray for Sybille and all those in Spain as the Covid 19 restrictions are modified and for the church in Spain, and those whose livelihood depends on the Camino. We pray for those who are working to look after all those who cannot look after themselves and who feel that they are alone.*

*Please allow us to pray for - You, your family, your congregation, your exploration of new ways of ministry in difficult times - the things on your heart this day. May the Christ who defies the rules of social distancing walk closely with you as you continue your Camino, now and always.*

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