

FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 13:14, 43-52

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats. Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God. On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth." The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Sing joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful song.

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

Know that the LORD is God; he made us, his we are; his people, the flock he tends.

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

The LORD is good: his kindness endures forever, and his faithfulness, to all generations.

We are his people, the sheep of his flock.

SECOND READING: Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

A reading from the Book of Revelation:

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. Then one of the elders said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "For this reason they stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is

in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The word of the Lord.

GOSPEL: John 10:27-30

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 4th Sunday of Easter

The missionary activity in the Acts of the Apostles has a pattern. Paul and his companions enter a synagogue on a Sabbath and preach. Their preaching falls flat on their chosen audience, there is conflict and then Paul vows to preach only to the gentiles who then rejoice. One gets the impression that as inspired as they were by the gospel message and the power of the Spirit, they had no idea how to convey it. They worked by trial and error. Today we call them saints, but as they lived they were fallible human beings just as we are. That they had any success is solely by the grace of God. By themselves, they would have failed.

How did they deal with their failure? This passage ended with the line, “The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.” Shaking the dust off their feet was never against those who rejected the disciple’s teaching. It was for the missionaries. Paul and Barnabas had more places to visit and more people to convert. They needed to be free of their burdens first. To leave them at a town’s border was a good plan. The disciples needed to hear, heed and live the gospel first. It was their lived witness that spoke more than their words. Eventually they got it right; here we are two millennia later.

Today’s passage from revelation has always reminded me of Palm Sunday mass. The priest wears red vestments. Red symbolizes the passion of Jesus, the blood of martyrs and their final witness of faith. People wave palm sheaves. The throng gathered around the living lamb that was slain who is Jesus. The risen Jesus still bears the wounds he suffered before he died and rose. This passage portrays an experience of liturgy and worship.

Who are these people? They have survived a time of trial. Some have survived and are still living and some had been martyred and live with eternal life. They gather together in the Kingdom of God upon Jesus’ return. This is a scene that attempts to describe what no one has yet experienced. Jesus has already triumphed over sin and death and God’s people await his return. This passage portrays our hope for eternal life in the Kingdom of God and all those who now share eternal life with God. This is a very early depiction of the Communion of the Saints. We are linked, in Christ, with all who have ever believed, all who believe now and all those

believers yet to be born. Revelation may not paint the scene with perfection because perfection will only become our reality when Jesus returns.

Who are the sheep and who are shepherds? From the standpoint of John's gospel, there is but one shepherd, Jesus. However, remember the washing of the disciples' feet during the Last Supper? Jesus commissioned all his followers, from that point on, to serve one another as he had done. In that the sheep of Jesus fold became shepherds too. We have this responsibility to each other in compassion, care and service.

Believing in God and in Jesus are all we need to receive new life and the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Our service to each other is the living witness and sign that our life in Christ is real. Faith in Jesus changes us all and the transformation of our faith we live in all we say and do. I like to point out that the English word for martyr is witness. When we live our witness to Christ, who do we become?

Having reflected on today's readings, I diverge a bit. The context of them has led me to reflect on the situation we face. Soon, on July 1, the three churches of our cluster, we, at Divine Savior, Our Lady Mother of the Church and St. Eugene will close as parishes. For a while, until Labor Day, there will be three worship sites for the newly formed, but as yet, unnamed parish that we all will form. In the beginning of September, our site will close and we will have to worship with new parishioners north or northwest of us. This includes me too; I will go with you in forming the new parish.

I've enjoyed serving, here, at Divine Savior. I grieve at our closing too. This is the third parish, where I have served, that will close. I worked at St. Boniface on the near-north side and St. Mary of the Assumption on the far south-east side near Riverdale and Dolton. They closed in 1999. The empty shell of St. Boniface has been a location, a couple of times, for Chicago PD. I worked there while still in the seminary in 1975-76. St. Mary's was my first assignment in 1979-81. This is the first one that is closing while I am still here. The first two weren't merging with anyone else. They simply closed. We all will have a place to go and belong to a larger, more diverse community.

In the past 43 years of my priestly ministry, I have left several parishes upon the ending of my assignment. After each assignment was over, I had to first leave a community to join another. The farewell is always difficult, but the welcome has been warm. The same will be true now for all of us who form a new parish. We can welcome each other. From my experience, this is real and not just spin. The Church, of which we are a part, is Christ's Church and not ours. Jesus is what defines us and not the familiar walls of Divine Savior. One other thing, I've always found the moving to be a chore. It's the arrival that counts.

We all know why this is happening. Finances, membership, staffing and upkeep are issues that we face. Let me state: all three of us are in the same boat. All three of our parish communities face the same challenges. These are not unlike the challenges that Paul and Barnabas faced in the Acts of the Apostles. They were stepping out as if into thin air on their mission with no safety net or visible means of support. That's just what we do now. Knowing and accepting the reasons why we will close and merge can not take away or hide the feelings. Grief, apprehension and loss are powerfully real feelings. I like to say that we live by faith and not

feelings. I also try to live it and it's not always easy to do. We can abide in our feelings, holding them close to us or we can express them; share them with each other. That can always help. It also builds community and community is the basis for Church. If we don't do that, that's where we'll stay; in our pain. We face a choice; move in faith. God is just a thought away. When we find God we can then find ourselves and one another in God as we walk by faith.

Paul, Barnabas and the early Church had Jesus, the Holy Spirit and one another. It sounds trite to say it, but that's all they needed. Through their time, treasure and talent, the Holy Spirit built the Church through the ages to us. In their stumbling missteps they moved toward God and each other. This is the way the Church worked then and works now. We will stumble; none of us have gone this way before. We will discover what works to grow together. The same gifts the young Church had also belong to us; Jesus, the Holy Spirit and each other unite in the Good News of Salvation. Their faith has led to us and our faith will lead to people not yet born. All of us journey, in Christ, to the Kingdom of God. We do this together with Christ and guided by the Spirit.

Just because Paul and Barnabas believed and preached the gospel, they had no guarantee to succeed. It was always over time and as the Church continued to grow that they could know the movement of the Spirit. They trusted God and each other as they worked. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, led them. We are the fruits of their work and now live in faith guided by Christ. We are in the grip of God no matter what happens. What can be the fruits of our work?

May the Good Shepherd continue to equip us for service.

James D. Beath
May 7-8, 2022