

# The Teaching Church

## St Barnabas

If we desire to find a vivid example of one who knew the meaning of and carried out in practice the Commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," we shall do well to consider carefully what we are told about Joses surnamed Barnabas. We are not in possession of any record of the teaching of St. Barnabas, but we have St. Luke's revealing pictures of his action at critical moments in the history of the Church.

We begin with the name given to him by the Apostles. In the Authorised Version we have this word rendered as "The Son of Consolation," in the Revised Version as "The Son of Exhortation." This word and that used for God the Holy Ghost are derived from the same Greek verb. The Paraclete is translated in St. John's Gospel, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, as the Comforter; in St. John's First Epistle the same word, used of Our Lord, is translated Advocate. The verb means to invoke, to admonish, to encourage, to comfort. Rackham suggests that "The Son of Encouragement" is the best translation of this word. Could a man earn a more beautiful name? If we ask how he earned it there can only be one answer. He so gave himself to God as to put no obstacle in the way of the Holy Spirit; he was a man marked out by possession of the fruit of the Spirit.

### Generosity.

A man lacking in generosity arrives very hardly at the state of loving his neighbour as himself. Generosity is one of the foundations of a noble character, and, if a man be led by the Spirit of God, it increases with the growth of the knowledge of God.

St. Barnabas joined in the common generosity of the Church; he had land and sold it and gave the pro-

ceeds to the Apostles for distribution to the poorer brethren. We are told that many others did the same, for the belief that an individual held his possessions only as a steward seems to have been common in that early, happy community. Yet generosity concerning material possessions, although very difficult for many men, is not the most exacting form taken by that virtue.

Antioch was a great and important city, and some of those who were driven out of Jerusalem began a mission in Antioch among those who were not Jews. Evidently this was most successful, for a great number turned to God and thus a great opportunity was given in a city of that size. The Apostles chose Barnabas to go to Antioch and observe what was happening.

St. Luke describes him as "a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith," and speaks of his joy when he saw the movement in that city. Plainly a leader of the first rank is needed to deal with this situation. We might imagine that nobody could be better than St. Barnabas himself. That, however, is not his view, for he departs to Tarsus to seek St. Paul and brings him to Antioch. Here is an example of generosity which is costly and, if it cannot be called rare, it certainly cannot be pretended to be common. To plainly and frankly admit the superior gifts of another man is not a virtue which everyone can claim (Acts 11, 19-26).

### Patience.

St. Barnabas and St. Paul worked together for a considerable time, partly in Antioch, partly upon the missionary journeys for which they were separated by the Holy Spirit. The day came when St. Paul proposed that they should visit again the

Churches they had founded and, St. Mark having rejoined them, is proposed by St. Barnabas as their companion. St. Paul will not agree because Mark had left them on a former occasion, and evidently St. Paul regarded this as a desertion which he could not overlook. St. Barnabas is determined to give Mark a second chance and opposes his fellow-Apostle, so that they part company (Acts 16, 36-40). The later history of St. Mark is obscure, though it is believed that he worked in Alexandria. Years later we find St. Paul's writing: "Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable for me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4, 11).

### Encouragement.

The situations in which the action of St. Barnabas is described are common enough. The relieving of the needs of our fellows, lowliness in judgment of ourselves and preference of others, patience and readiness to forgive. Plainly St. Barnabas excelled because he was faithful and docile to the Holy Spirit, but while we admire him there is no necessity to make the mistake of supposing that such gifts need be peculiar to him. The source of these gifts is clear because of the name given to him by the Apostles, and we have Our Lord's own promise as recorded by St. Luke (11, 13), "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." In the attempts we make to fulfil the command "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" we should do well to keep before us the example of this saint, to acknowledge the source of all power and to use the collect appointed for St. Barnabas' Day frequently in our private prayers:

"O Lord God Almighty, Who didst endue thy holy Apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost, leave us not, we beseech Thee, destitute of Thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them always to Thy honour and glory, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen."

—S. F. N. W.