

## Fifth Sunday of Easter C Reading 1

### Acts 14:21-27

After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news to that city

and made a considerable number of disciples,  
they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.  
They strengthened the spirits of the disciples  
and exhorted them to persevere in the faith, saying,  
“It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships  
to enter the kingdom of God.”

They appointed elders for them in each church and,  
with prayer and fasting, commended them to the Lord  
in whom they had put their faith.

Then they traveled through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia.  
After proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia.  
From there they sailed to Antioch,  
where they had been commended to the grace of God  
for the work they had now accomplished.  
And when they arrived, they called the church together  
and reported what God had done with them  
and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

### Jerome Biblical Commentary

*Derbe:* This town was situated about 60 mi. E of Lystra; its site has been definitely identified through an inscription discovered in 1956 at Kerti Hüyük (see M. Ballance, *Anatolian Studies* 7 [1957] 145-51; P. W. Skehan, [CBQ](#) 20 [1958] 59; G. Ogg, [NTS](#) 9 [1962-63] 367-70).<sup>22</sup> *persevere in the faith:* This Lucan expression is an exhortation to the unflinching practice of Christianity. Luke passed over all mention of the persecution that Barnabas and Paul had experienced in the towns through which they now pass on their return.<sup>23</sup> *they installed elders:* Paul and Barnabas see that a structure and an institution are set up locally; it apparently resembled that of Jerusalem (see 11:30; 21:18). These elders are significantly not elected by the local communities, but are appointed by the traveling missionaries (cf. 20:17). The ptc. cheirotonēsantes, which at times means to “elect by raising the hand” (2 Cor 8:19), here means simply “appoint, install” ([AG](#) 889). Some commentators think that Luke has here retroverted a later institutional structure.<sup>24</sup> *Pisidia:* The region near Antioch (see comment on 13:14). *Pamphylia:* See comment on 13:13.<sup>26</sup> *Antioch:* In Syria (see 13:2-3).<sup>27</sup> *all that God had accomplished with them:* See 15:4, 12; 21:19. *opened the door of faith:* This figure is also used by Paul in 1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12. Here it signifies the access that God had given the Gentiles to salvation through the missionaries.

[CBQ](#) Catholic Biblical Quarterly

[NTS](#) New Testament Studies

[AG](#) W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1957)

Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos

Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

## Haydock's Catholic Commentary

**Ver. 21.** *Through many tribulations.* Our daily offences require the paternal chastisement of the Almighty. The concupiscence of the flesh too, which wills against the spirit, must be subdued by punishment. Woe then to you, lovers of this world, who wish to pass your lives without tribulation, enemies of the cross. Senseless creatures, is the disciple above his master? Did it not become Christ first to suffer, and thus to enter into his glory? and shall we pretend to enter by any other means? &c. (Denis the Carthusian)

**Ver. 22.** *When they had ordained for them priests.* [1] The Protestant translation, following the grammatical etymology of the Greek word *presbyter*, always puts *elders*. Yet they of the Church of England allow, and maintain, that by this Greek word in this, and many other places, are signified the ministers of God, known by the name of *bishops* or priests, according to the ecclesiastical use of the same word. It is evident that here are not meant elders, as to age and years. Nay, though we adhere to the grammatical signification, we should rather translate priests, since the English word *priest*, as well as the French word *prêtre*, come from *presbyter*. But of this word more hereafter. We may also take notice, that the Calvinists here translate, *ordained by election*, pretending by the derivation of the Greek word, that church ministers were only chosen, and deputed by the votes and suffrages of people; and not by any ordination, or consecration by a bishop; nor by any character or sacrament of order. But their argument from this Greek word is frivolous, and groundless, as hath been shewn by Mr. Bois on this verse, by Mr. Legh in his *Critica Sacra*, &c. (Witham) --- We see from this text, 1st, that Sts. Paul and Barnabas were bishops, having authority to confer holy orders: 2nd. that there was even then a difference betwixt bishops and priests, though the name in the primitive Church was often used indifferently; 3rd. that fasting and praying were constant preparatives for holy orders. (Bristow)

**Ver. 24.** This Antioch was a sea-port in Pamphylia. (Bible de Vence)

**Ver. 25.** *From whence they had been delivered*, up to their ministry, and their apostolical *mission by the grace of God*; that is, where they had been first chosen by the direction of the Spirit of God, ordained priests and bishops, and had received power, and graces to discharge their offices of apostles. (Witham)

**Ver. 27.** *No little time.* It is not precisely known how long he remained there, nor what he did. St. Luke relates nothing of what happened from the 46th year of Christ to the 51st [from A.D. 46 to A.D. 51], in which the Council of Jerusalem was held. It is probable St. Paul spent that time carrying the gospel among the neighbouring provinces. (Calmet)

## Daily Bible Study Series (non-Catholic)

### CONFIRMING THE CHURCH

Acts 14:21-28

When they had preached the good news to that city and had made a considerable number of disciples they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch. As they went they strengthened the souls of the disciples and urged them to abide in the faith, saying, "It is through many an affliction that we must enter into the kingdom of God." In each church they chose elders, and, when they had prayed with fasting, they offered them to the Lord in whom they had believed. When they had gone through Pisidia they came to Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga they went down to Attaleia. From there they sailed away to Antioch, from which they had been handed over to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. On their arrival there, when they had called a meeting of the church, they told them the story of all that God had done with them and that he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They spent a long time with the disciples.

In this passage there are three notable lights on the mind of Paul.

(i) There is his utter honesty to the people who had chosen to become Christians. He frankly told them that it was through many an affliction they would have to enter into the kingdom of God. He offered them no easy way. He acted on the principle that Jesus had come "not to make life easy but to make men great."

(ii) On the return journey Paul set apart elders in all the little groups of newly-made Christians. He showed that it was his conviction that Christianity must be lived in a fellowship. As one of the great fathers put it, "No man can have God for his father unless he has the Church for his mother." As John Wesley put it, "No man ever went to heaven alone; he must either find friends or make them." From the very beginning but to was Paul's aim not only to make individual Christians but to build these individuals into a Christian fellowship.

(iii) Paul and Barnabas never thought that it was their strength which had achieved anything. They spoke of what God had done with them. They regarded themselves only as fellow-labourers with God. After the great victory of Agincourt, Henry the king forbade any songs to be made and ordered that all the glory should be given to God. We begin to have the right idea of Christian service when we work, not for our own honour, but from the conviction that we are tools in the hand of God.

### THE CRUCIAL PROBLEM

THE influx of Gentiles into the Church produced a problem which had to be solved. The mental background of the Jew was founded on the fact that he belonged to the chosen people. In effect they believed that not only were the Jews the peculiar possession of God but also that God was the peculiar possession of the Jews. The problem was this. Before a Gentile became a member of the Christian Church was it necessary that he should be circumcised and take upon himself the Law of Moses? In other words—must the Gentile, before he became a Christian, first become a Jew? Or, could a Gentile be received into the Church as such?

Even were that question settled there arose another problem. The strict Jew could have no intercourse with a Gentile. He could not have him as guest nor be his guest. He would not, as far as possible, even do business with him. So then, even if Gentiles were allowed into the Church, how far could Jews and Gentiles associate in the ordinary social life of the Church?

These were the problems which had to be solved. The solution was not easy. But in the end the Church took the decision that there should be no difference between Jew and Gentile at all. The 15th chapter of Acts tells of the Council of Jerusalem whose decisions were the

charter of freedom for the Gentiles.

*The Acts of the Apostles*. 2000, c1976 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. The Westminster Press: Philadelphia

## The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (non-Catholic)

Paul and Barnabas expressed their care and concern for the new believers. An effective servant of God knows the Great Commission is not merely to gain professions of faith but to nurture that faith to maturity. **After the missionaries had preached the gospel at Derbe and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch.** When they had completed the work in Derbe, Paul and Barnabas revisited the three cities they had just come from. Such visits were fraught with danger. Some have speculated that by this time new Roman magistrates were in office. Even if that were true, the Jewish communities in all three cities remained implacably opposed to the gospel. Paul and Barnabas knew, however, that it was far more dangerous to the gospel cause for those new flocks not to be strengthened.

Paul and Barnabas's nurture of their children in the faith involved at least four elements. Their first task was **strengthening the souls of the disciples**. **Strengthening** is from *epīstērizō*, a word used elsewhere in Acts to speak of strengthening believers (15:32, 41; 18:23). That should be the goal of every pastor (cf. Eph. 4:11–16; Col. 4:12–13), and is done by the teaching of the Word (Acts 20:31–32; 1 John 2:14).

Besides their teaching, Paul and Barnabas were **encouraging**, or coming alongside, the disciples to exhort them to obedience. Believers must not only be taught sound biblical truths but also exhorted to practice them. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that “we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children” (1 Thess. 2:11). Exhortation is teaching’s inseparable companion.

Paul and Barnabas’s exhortation was twofold. First, they exhorted the believers to **continue in the faith**. Perseverance is an essential mark of saving faith (cf. John 8:31; Col. 1:21–23; Heb. 3:6; and the discussion of Acts 13:42b in chapter 3 of this volume). That aspect of exhortation was especially important considering that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God** (cf. Matt. 11:12; 13:20–21; 16:24–25; 19:27–29; Mark 4:16–17; Luke 14:26–35). Perseverance in the Christian life is a ceaseless warfare against the forces of the kingdom of darkness (cf. Eph. 6:10ff.). Christians therefore need to be reminded to expect hardships and persecution and not be dismayed by them. Jesus promised that “in the world you have tribulation” (John 16:33). “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus,” Paul exhorted Timothy, since “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 2:3; 3:12). James gave the good news that such tribulation produces spiritual endurance (James 1:2–4), and Peter confirms that truth in 1 Peter 5:10.

Another key to effective follow-up is organization. Knowing their time with the believers in these cities would be brief, Paul and Barnabas made long-term arrangements for their continued growth. They did that by appointing **elders for them in every church**. Those undershepherds of the Great Shepherd were to faithfully lead and care for the flock long after Paul and Barnabas were gone (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1–3). That some had reached the level of spiritual maturity required of elders in so short a time shows the intensity of Paul and Barnabas’s teaching and exhortation. That the elders were chosen

only after they had **prayed with fasting** shows the seriousness with which the selection process should be approached.

Having done all that was humanly possible for their converts, the missionaries **commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed** (cf. Acts 20:32). Such an attitude acknowledges the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of the church and the source of all truth and power.

#### COMMITMENT

**And they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; (14:24–25)**

Exhausted by their travels and hard work in the proclamation of the gospel, the two missionaries headed home. Having **passed through Pisidia**, they **came into Pamphylia**, to the city of **Perga**. Others may have rested before going **down to** the seaport of **Attalia** and booking passage for home, but not Paul and Barnabas. Such was their commitment to their evangelistic calling that they did not leave until **they had spoken the word in Perga**. As noted in the discussion of Acts 13:14 in chapter 2 of this volume, Paul and Barnabas apparently had not preached in Perga the first time they were there. Leaving nothing undone, they proceeded to do so. They were committed, no matter what their circumstances, to fulfilling their calling.

#### REVERENCE

**and from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples. (14:26–28)**

Their long, arduous journey finally over, Paul and Barnabas left Attalia and **from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished**. The church at **Antioch** was no doubt overjoyed at the return of their two beloved pastors. Their work, **commended** at the outset **to the grace of God** (cf. 9:15–16; 13:2–4), had been very successful, as the missionaries **began to report**.

Some may have boasted of all they had done, of the churches they had planted, the number of converts they had made, and the miracles they had performed, but not Paul and Barnabas. They kept all their accomplishments in the proper perspective, noting that **God had done** all those things through **them and that He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles**. They saw themselves as instruments through whom God had accomplished His purposes; and all the glory went to Him. That is an essential perspective for a servant of the Lord.

Through their Spirit-giftedness, boldness, power, humility, persistence, caring, commitment, and reverence for God, Paul and Barnabas had been used to accomplish much for the kingdom. Those qualities still mark those who walk the path to effective Christian service.

MacArthur, J. 1994, c1996. *Acts*. Moody Press: Chicago