

Readings: *Acts 11: 21 – 26, 13: 1 – 3; Psalm 98 (97); Matthew 10: 7 – 13.*

The Western Church gives the title 'apostle' to eleven disciples chosen by Jesus, to Matthias selected by lot to fill the place of Judas, to Paul uniquely called by the Risen Lord, to Mary Magdalene as 'apostle to the apostles', and to today's saint, Barnabas. The title comes from the Greek word meaning 'to send'. It is usually regarded as the equivalent of a Hebrew word which means a delegate who acts and speaks in the name of the person who sends him, as a British Ambassador represents the Queen.

Jesus speaks of himself as sent by the Father, and on the first Easter Day tells the disciples: *As the Father sent me, so I am sending you* (John 20: 21). Saint Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians writes: *We are ambassadors for Christ* (5: 20).

Barnabas shares the title 'apostle' with Paul and the others because, as we hear in today's reading from the *Acts of the Apostles*, he too was sent as a delegate. He was commissioned by the Jerusalem Church to extend the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentile believers in Antioch. His experience there led him to fetch Paul from Tarsus to join him in the task of teaching the Gentiles. His friendship with Paul is one of the most notable examples of the quality which earlier led the apostles to add to his name Joseph the name Barnabas, which Luke translates as 'son of encouragement' (Acts 4: 36). He had the gift of drawing out the possibilities in fellow Christians. Barnabas appears in the *Acts of the Apostles* (chapters 13 & 14) as a companion of Paul in his missions to his own homeland, Cyprus, and in Asia Minor, and went with him to the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), at which decisions were reached about the admission of Gentiles to the Church. After this he and Paul parted company because of a difference of opinion over John Mark (a cousin of Barnabas – Colossians 4:10). Barnabas trusted Mark, as he had trusted Paul, and returned with him to Cyprus (Acts 15: 36 – 39). That is the last event in his life recorded in Scripture, but tradition records that he was martyred by his fellow countrymen and buried by John Mark near Salamis in Cyprus.

Pray (in the words of a collect for his feast) *Help us, by his example, to be generous in our judgements and unselfish in our service.*