

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter May 12th, 2019, Year C

### Acts 13:14, 43-52

**14 Paul and Barnabas** This man was a Levite from Cyprus who sold his property and gave the money to the apostles. It was Barnabas who persuaded the Jerusalem community to receive Paul as a disciple. With Paul he carried the contribution from Antioch to Jerusalem during the famine. Later, he and Paul were selected by the prophets and teachers of Antioch to carry the gospel to cities where it had not yet been preached. Along with John Mark, they began the First of Paul's missionary journeys of which today's selection is a part.<sup>7</sup> **continued on from Perga** This city was 12 miles inland from the coast of Pamphylia, a Roman province in southern Asia Minor (modern Turkey)<sup>2</sup> **and reached Antioch in Pisidia.** This was a hazardous trip through the mountains. While there were two towns with the same name, this town of Antioch was a prominent city in southern Galatia that was home to a large Jewish community.<sup>2</sup> **On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats.** Paul starts with the local Jewish synagogue every time he enters a new missionary frontier in Acts. This strategy was shaped by practical as well as theological considerations: on the one hand, synagogues already served as weekly gathering places where Jews came together for prayer and religious instruction; on the other, Paul was driven by the conviction that Israel stood first in line to inherit the blessings of the messianic age.

**43 Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism** These were converts to Judaism who submitted to circumcision.<sup>3</sup> **followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God.**

**44 On the following Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.** Luke's purpose is to contrast the widespread enthusiasm of the populace at large with the jealousy of the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

**45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said.** Here we see a dispute developing between Paul and the Jews over the offer of the Gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup>

**46 Both Paul and Barnabas** (Notice that Paul is mentioned first.) **spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you (the Jews) first,** The apostles prioritized the evangelization of Israel before reaching out to the Gentiles.<sup>2</sup> **but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles** (non-Jews). Paul is not abandoning his mission to Israel, he is simply turning away from the hardened leaders of the Antioch synagogue. This is confirmed by his preaching to Jews in the very next episode.<sup>2</sup> This becomes a major theme of Luke's presentation and by its repetition we know that it was important.<sup>3</sup> We should understand that the evangelization of the pagan world is not a consequence of Jewish rejection of the Word; it is required by the universal character of Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

**47 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.'**" This quote is from Isaiah 49:6. In context, Yahweh commissions his Servant first to restore the dispersed tribes of Israel and then to spread his salvation far and wide to all nations. As in Isaiah, where the Servant symbolized both the redeemer (individual) and the redeemed of Israel (collective), Paul contends that Jesus the Servant continues his mission through the servant apostles who are sent to enlighten the Gentiles.<sup>2</sup> Actually, the interest of the Gentiles in this Gospel is a sign of the fulfillment of this prophecy.<sup>1</sup>

**48 The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord.** This is a contrast to verse 46 where the Jews rejected the word of God and were "unworthy of eternal life". **All who were destined for eternal life came to believe,** Nothing can force men and women to accept the good news. And nothing can stop the good news from being accepted by men and women who freely choose to believe.<sup>4</sup>

49and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. One of the most significant historical facts of the cultural and religious character of the early Church by the end of the first century is the Church's demographic shift from Jewish to largely Gentile membership.<sup>5</sup>

50The 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. This reference to persecution comes from the experience of some early Christians' persecution by some Jews. Paul, before his conversion, engaged in this persecution himself before finding himself on its receiving end.<sup>5</sup>

51So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, This is a symbolic curse gesture. It adapts the Jewish custom of shaking dust from one's sandals before reentering the land of Israel from Gentile territory.<sup>2</sup> Our Lord extended the meaning of the phrase when he told the disciples he was sending out to preach, "If any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet." This gesture of Paul and Barnabas echoes what Jesus said and amounted to "closing the case" or putting on record the unbelief of the Jews.<sup>6</sup> and went to Iconium. This was a city of southern Galatia about 80 miles southeast of Antioch of Pisidia.<sup>2</sup>

52The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. The code words used here by Luke indicate that this foundation is an authentic realization of the Church: it is filled with joy and "Holy Spirit."<sup>8</sup>

### Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

*In this heavenly vision John is reminding the persecuted: "After death, life—eternal, painless, ever-joyful! Therefore, do not despair. Do not fall apart. Do not say, "What's the use?" Be patient. The Lord has sealed you at baptism. He loves you. He has conquered death by His resurrection. Endure!"*

9I, John, had a vision His first vision in vv 4-8 showed the church on earth *before* the last day as it was being sealed. This second vision shows the church at worship before the throne *after* the last day.<sup>13</sup> of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people and tongue. This is the Church triumphant IN HEAVEN.<sup>9</sup> This great crowd includes all the saved and not just the martyrs.<sup>11</sup> It is consoling and encouraging to know that those who attain heaven constitute a huge multitude in contrast to the passages of Matthew 7:14 and Luke 13:24 which seem to imply that very few will be saved.<sup>11</sup> This could also be a possible allusion to the promise made to Abraham when he was told to look up at the sky and count the stars, for just so would his descendants be.<sup>3</sup> They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes In the letter to the church in Sardis, "those persons who have not soiled their garments shall walk with me in white because they are worthy." Here we also have the image of the Baptismal garment where sin has not defiled the soul.(Rev.3:4) These white robes signify resurrected bodily glory.<sup>12</sup> Liturgically, white is the color for holiness, joy and purity. It is used for feasts of Our Lord, the BVM, angels, All Saints, Confessors, Virgins, the Trinity, Sundays of Easter and funerals.<sup>14</sup> and holding palm branches in their hands. Palm branches were symbols of victory and joy after war.<sup>12</sup> Palms are considered a sign of the victory and of the thanksgiving of the elect.<sup>3</sup> This is the Church triumphant AT WORSHIP.

14bThen one of the elders said to me, "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; This could be either a time of great tribulation like the fierce persecution by the Romans or the tribulation that will mark the end of the world, or it could refer to the suffering through all ages. Rosser assures us that "persecution is inevitable and suffering for the faith is integral to the Christian experience. The part of us where genuine faith resides is always something of a

battleground. Believing completely in Jesus and the values of his kingdom puts us at odds with many of the values of the world in which we live. While we may be able to practice our religion without interference, we are very much mistaken if we believe that the sincere practice of our faith will go unchallenged.”<sup>4</sup> **they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** Their robes are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, which is probably a reference to baptism. We are washed clean in baptism, through the merits of Christ’s sacrifice (the blood). God will care for all those who are thus cleansed and who have remained faithful.<sup>10</sup> The “white robe” is not a consequence of entry into glory, but rather, a condition for entry.<sup>3</sup>

**15For this reason they stand before God’s throne and worship him day and night in his temple.** God will be present to His people.<sup>13</sup> **The one who sits on the throne will shelter them.** This is allied with the Shekinah doctrine of Yahweh’s visible, glorious presence in the wilderness tabernacle, in the temple, and in the prolog of the fourth Gospel.<sup>9</sup> The elect living in the intimacy of God are represented as ceaselessly celebrating a celestial liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

**16They will not** Verses 16 and 17 are in the future tense and the vision ends with a promise.<sup>3</sup> **hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them.** This is a human description of a spiritual reality. Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 49:10, all their hungers and thirsts are satisfied for God himself is the fountain of life.<sup>12</sup>

**17For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them** The shepherd was a symbol of gentleness and authority, solicitude and power. The shepherd was guide, protector, companion and caretaker of his flock. This became an image for their kings. Here we have the reversal of the Lamb as the Shepherd. This is the miracle of the Incarnation. As one of us, Christ is Lamb, as God, He is Shepherd.<sup>1</sup> **and lead them to springs of life-giving water, God’s grace. and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** The tears express an awareness of our exile from heaven. Again, as Isaiah prophesied, every tear will be wiped from their eyes.<sup>12</sup>

## **John 10:27-30**

*Every year, the gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Easter speaks of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. So this is often called Good Shepherd Sunday.<sup>10</sup>*

*We are told in verse 22 that the time is that of the feast of Dedication or Hanukkah in mid-December, when the Jews celebrated the reconsecration of the temple by Judas the Maccabean (164 B.C.) after its profanation three years earlier by the Syrian Antiochus IV Epiphanes.<sup>18</sup> (After being defeated in Egypt, Antiochus expressed his frustration by attacking Judea, ruthlessly slaughtering men, women and children, and invading the Temple. There he carried off the golden altar, menorahs and vessels; and to show his contempt for the God of Israel he sacrificed there a pig to Zeus. He forbade circumcision, observing of the Sabbath, and commanded that only pigs be sacrificed in the Temple. He himself cooked a pig in the Temple and poured its broth on the holy Torah scrolls and on the altar.)<sup>19</sup> The setting for this selection is Solomon’s Portico, the porch on the east side of the temple. The Jewish liturgical celebration of the festival included the text of Ezekiel 34 in which God states, “I myself will look after and tend my sheep.” The minds of Jesus’ listeners would have been attuned to the association that he was making between himself and God, the Shepherd of his people Israel. In referring to himself as THE shepherd, Jesus was identifying himself with the God who had promised to shepherd his people in Ez 34:11. When his listeners ask Jesus for a clear declaration that he is the promised Messiah, he responds, “You refuse to believe because you are not my sheep.”<sup>21</sup>*

## **Jesus said:**

**27“My sheep hear my voice;** The words and deeds of Jesus were one continuous claim to be the anointed one of God. Those attuned to the word of God recognize who he is.<sup>3</sup> Our Lord openly proclaimed his Messiahship and confirmed it by works and miracles. However, the people’s ideas of

a Messiah did not correspond with God's idea of a Messiah. They were looking for someone who would break the Roman yoke, liberate the people and give them material prosperity.<sup>21</sup> **I know them, and they follow me.** The pasturage to which he leads them is eternal life.<sup>3</sup> In perfect loving obedience to God's will, Jesus has not only shown us the way to salvation; he has also become the way to salvation.<sup>4</sup>

**28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.** The protection that Jesus provides for his sheep is equivalent to the Father's divine protection. This means, from the perspective of the OT, that Christ wields the sovereign power of Yahweh to shield the righteous from the threats of their enemies.<sup>15</sup>

**29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,** God is greater than any power or any evil. God's omnipotence is the guarantee of the gift.<sup>3</sup> **and no one can take them out of the Father's hand.** While no external agent, no person on earth, can snatch us out of God's hand, each of us can choose to abandon him, each of us can leave, if we so choose. If we choose to leave and reject what he has given us, he will honor our choice.<sup>16</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas commented on this verse: "I can see, thanks to the light of the sun; but if I close my eyes, I cannot see: this is no fault of the sun, it is my own fault, because by closing my eyes, I prevent the sunlight from reaching me."<sup>17</sup>

**30 The Father and I are one.**" The Father and the Son are united in the loving embrace of the Spirit. They are one in mind, will and action. We cannot, therefore, divide the essential unity of the Trinity when we distinguish between the three Divine Persons.<sup>15</sup> The Catechism answers the question: "How is the Son of God man?" by saying that Christ's human nature was assumed, not absorbed.<sup>20</sup> The heretics of the first centuries, especially the Arians, denied the unity of substance between the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed was the answer to this heresy: "True God from true God, Begotten not made, one in being with the Father."<sup>19</sup>

*Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst, (2) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles," (3) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary, (4) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Aelred R. Rosser, (5) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers 2007" by James L. Weaver, (6) "The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles," (7) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (8) "The Acts of the Apostles" by Luke Timothy Johnson, (9) "The Book of the Apocalypse" by William G. Heidt, O.S.B., (10) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers" by Lawrence E. Mick, (11) "The Navarre Bible: Revelation", (12) "The Apocalypse and the Third Millennium" by George T. Montague, S.M., (13) "Revelation" by Wilfrid J. Harrington, O.P., (14) "Catholic Source Book" Edited by Rev. Peter Klein, (15) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John," (16) "Bible Basics" by Steve Kellmeyer, (17) "The Navarre Bible: St John", (18) "John" by Neal M. Flanagan, O.S.M., (19) "The Gospel of St. John" by Stephen K. Ray, (20) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church" (470), and (21) "Life Of Christ" by Fulton J. Sheen.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*