

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



We call ourselves Christians

"Barnabas," James said, "if you are willing, we need your assistance in a certain matter." James knew that this good man was always ready to give his help to the new Church, but he didn't want to take unfair advantage of him.

"If it has anything to do with our great cause, of course I am willing," Barnabas answered, smiling as if he had read James' thoughts.

"During the persecution of our Church in Jerusalem," James began, "many of these believers fled to other cities. There they continued to preach about Jesus."

"Well, that certainly is encouraging news," Barnabas replied.

"Yes, it is," James said, nodding in agreement. "We have heard that there is now a large group of followers living in Antioch. We need someone to go there and check on their progress and report these findings back to us in Jerusalem."

"I will leave first thing in the morning," Barnabas said firmly.

"Thank you, good friend. Now get some rest," James advised. "You work too hard."

Antioch was several days' journey from Jerusalem. It was a large city under Roman jurisdiction, but remained, nevertheless, a center of Greek culture.

When Barnabas reached the center of

town, he paused to rest for awhile. Just across the town square, someone had built a statue of the pagan god, Zeus. Antioch was certain to be filled with these symbols, because the Greeks had a long history of pagan worship. Barnabas frowned disapprovingly and wondered how the Church had survived in such an atmosphere. It offended him to be among these signs of idolatry.

"You may worship no other god than the Lord thy God," said the stranger as he sat down beside Barnabas.

"And you shall not make for yourself any idols," answered Barnabas, turning to look at the stranger who had spoken. He was a young man of perhaps 18 or 19, probably in search of a few moments of idle conversation.

"Antioch is a storehouse of these graven images," the stranger said. "You'll see them all over the city. And yet, the new movement continues to grow, and prosper!"

"The new movement?" said Barnabas.

"The new Church, the followers of Jesus," the young man replied.

"So what we heard in Jerusalem is correct!" Barnabas said with a great deal of pleasure. "The Church has indeed taken root in Antioch!"

"Yes, it has, and it has strong roots

among the Greeks as well as the Jews," his companion explained. "Here in Antioch, we call ourselves 'Christians'."

"Christians, followers of Christ," Barnabas said. "I like that. I like that very much!"

The next day, Barnabas went to meet the other members of the Church in Antioch. He was very impressed by their faith in Jesus. Barnabas decided to go to Tarsus and bring Paul back with him to Antioch to help the new Church. Together they ministered to both the Greeks and the Jews, and taught them all about the beliefs of Jesus. They also sent word to the Church in Jerusalem about the Greek converts. A short time later a letter arrived from James. Paul frowned as he read it.

"James says that our Greek people must become Jews first before they can be fully accepted into the Church," Paul said. "That's ridiculous!"

"Now, Paul!" Barnabas said calmly, "don't get yourself all worked up. The Church in Jerusalem probably holds the same view of the Greeks as the one you and I used to have. They see these Greeks as the worshippers of false gods."

"But, if they could see our Greeks — they are an example of what it means to be faith-filled!"

"I know, Paul. It is just going to take some time. It'll all work out, you'll see," Barnabas replied.

"Jesus is for everyone who accepts Him in faith, not just the Jews," Paul argued.

Paul and Barnabas continued their work at Antioch for a year. There was still no agreement from the Church in Jerusalem

about the Greek converts. One day the prophet, Agabus, came to a Church meeting and asked Paul and Barnabas if he could speak to the people gathered there.

"I have had a vision," he said. "The Spirit has inspired me to tell you that a great famine will come soon upon the land of Israel!"

When the people heard this, they decided to take up a collection so that they could send an offering to the Church in Jerusalem. Each person gave as much as he could. They gave the gift to Barnabas and Paul to take to James and the other elders in Jerusalem.

"Tell James that we give our offering in the spirit of Christian love and unity," they said.

A great famine did come, just as Agabus had predicted, during the reign of Claudius.

For discussion:

- 1) What was the "great cause" that Barnabas spoke about?
- 2) Barnabas was offended by the statue to a false god. What types of false gods do we have today?
- 3) Is Jesus just for a select few people? What did Paul say was necessary for acceptance into the Church?

For further reading:

- 1) The story of the Church at Antioch is found in the New Testament in Acts, Chapter 11:19-30.
- 2) Barnabas and the young man named two commandments in their conversation. The Ten Commandments are found in the Old Testament in Exodus, Chapter 20:3-17.

One-woman play set at Cenacle retreat center

J. Janda's one woman play "Julian," with Roberta Nobleman, will be presented at the Cenacle Center for spiritual Renewal on Sunday, June 8, at 2 p.m. The afternoon will include the play, refreshments, a presentation, reflection and discussion.

Based on the life of Julian of Norwich — woman, mystic, spiritual guide — the program includes a real look at Julian's theology and

what it means today; Julian's concept of "no wrath in God," the feminine in God and Jesus; her radical teachings regarding sin; and her response to the question, "Who do you say I am?"

The offering for the afternoon is \$10. Reservations are necessary; contact the Cenacle, 693 East Ave., Rochester, (716) 271-8755.

Cenacle Center schedules overeaters' retreat for June

Compulsion controls and communications changes will be the subject of a retreat for compulsive overeaters, June 13-15, at the Cenacle Center for Spiritual Renewal, 693 East Ave., Rochester. Sister Mary Sullivan, a member of Overeaters Anonymous, will direct the retreat.

The weekend will offer reflection on the

spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of overeating. Along with a film slide presentation, talks and discussions, there will be time for quiet prayer and an opportunity for private consultation with one of the Cenacle sisters. An offering of \$60 is requested.

For reservations or information, please contact the Cenacle Ministry Office at (716)271-8755.

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