

Acts 12:24-13:5a

When hearing our first reading, there doesn't seem to be a whole lot to comment on. We hear that the apostles have completed their relief mission in Jerusalem. Now in Antioch, certain prophets and teachers are listed. And then the Holy Spirit directs the community to set aside Barnabas and Saul. It all sounds pretty straightforward.

But as I reflected more upon the passage, I noticed a number of details. For example, the text says that they were "worshipping and fasting." This is very important. This phrase gives us a glimpse into the life of the early Church. Before doing anything significant, they worshipped and fasted.

When wanting to do something new, my temptation is to plan it all out and then ask for God's blessing. It's as if I say, "All right, I have it all figured out. Now bless what I've done." This is backwards. How do I know this is what God wants me to do? Instead of planning then praying, the order should be praying then planning. Planning should flow from prayer.

Before making big decisions, it's critical to pray. If you are changing jobs, pray. If you are having family problems, pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. It's important to ask for the Heart of Jesus as you plan!

In our text today, we then hear that the Holy Spirit speaks to them. He says to set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. The Holy Spirit is not a force, but rather a Person. He speaks. He has a will. In our prayers, it's important to ask the Holy Spirit, "What do you will?"

It's interesting that the Holy Spirit sent out Paul and Barnabas. When Jesus summoned the Twelve, He sent them out "two by two" (Mk. 6:7). Again, we can learn from this. When sharing our faith with someone away from the Church, it's important to go with a friend. Friends give support and encouragement.

Finally, we hear that they landed on the island of Cyprus where they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. The synagogue was like a community center for study and worship. Given that people there were open to God, it was a natural place to begin. Like Barnabas and Paul, look for the opening in people's lives – where they are open to God when sharing your faith with them.

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!