

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Cycle B
(Where the Ascension is observed on Thursday)
Acts of the Apostles 1:15-17, 20A, 20C-26
Psalm 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20
1 John 4:11-16
John 17:11B-19
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Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.
The Garaventa Center
The University of Portland

How do you suppose Barsabbas felt after the election? A new apostle was needed. Judas had to be replaced. Two candidates were chosen from among those who had been disciples from the beginning: Matthias and Barsabbas. Then, to give the Holy Spirit a voice in the decision, the two men drew lots. Barsabbas drew the short straw. Matthias became the twelfth apostle.

If Barsabbas was seeking a great career in the Church, he must have felt devastated. To be that close to being an apostle, and to lose out. And to Matthias! He was doubtless tempted to make a few unedifying comments about Matthias. Perhaps Barsabbas' friends gathered round to commiserate with him -- to assure him that he was the better candidate, and to console him with the hope that he would at least get a favorable mention in the New Testament.

Now naturally, we hope that a potential apostle like Barsabbas was above this kind of thing. Though when we remember the petty squabbles among the apostles about who was going to sit at Christ's right hand when he came into his kingdom, we might have our doubts. But in any case, our instinct is that Barsabbas must have accepted the results of the election with good grace. He must have been free of ambition and

jealousy. He would have accepted that God's will had been done, confident that God loved him, and had a plan for him, and that it would all work out for the best.

But, of course, if we're going to hold Barsabbas to this standard, we must hold ourselves to it as well. Our Gospel tells us that before he ascended into heaven, Jesus prayed for each of us -- that's you and me -- and commended us to his Father's love and protection. Then he said, "Since I have sent them into the world, I consecrate myself to them." God has a loving plan to shower each of us with every good gift we can carry.

Now we all believe that, and because we believe that, we ought to be able to relax a bit. We needn't feel as if our success and our well-being depend exclusively upon a combination of luck and our own frantic efforts. We needn't be ruled by ambition or scarred by jealousy. Each of us is a personal favorite of the creator of the universe. Christ would have lived and died for any one of us, if he or she was the only person in the world. All we need to do is to remain faithful, and use the gifts God has given us in the service of the people God sends our way.

That leads me to another point. We know that we can't just pray for the hungry. We have to feed them. We can't just pray for the sick. We have to care for them. We are God's hands in the world. Well, the same is true of divine providence. Where we see faith in our cynical world, where we see idealism and self-sacrifice, especially among the young, we must cherish it, foster it, and reward it. When we encounter people who are in the world, but not of it, we should take a hand at protecting them from the evil one. Those who dare to let go and trust God must find us to be their friends. In a sense, we can be instruments of

God's loving plan for them.

And as for ourselves, we must pray, reflecting on the providential ways God has acted in our lives in the past, and looking for the ways God is urging us to go now. And when we see a way forward, we can follow it with peace of mind and heart, confident that our lives and our hopes are in God's loving hands.