

Today the Church celebrates St Barnabas.

And here in our Diocese of Nottingham, we celebrate something else as well:
the Solemnity of our Cathedral Church of St Barnabas.

So today is not only the feast of a saint.

It is the feast of the mother church of our diocese.

The church from which the bishop teaches,
governs,
and sanctifies the people entrusted to his care.

In a sense, today is a family feast.

A reminder that we belong to something larger than our own parish.

We belong to the Diocese of Nottingham.
We belong to the Catholic Church.
We belong to Christ.

And it is fitting that our cathedral bears the name of Barnabas.

Because Barnabas appears at a crucial moment in the history of the Church.

The Gospel is spreading.

The Church is growing.

People are becoming Christians in places where nobody expected Christianity to
take root.

And Barnabas is sent to see what is happening.

What does he do?

The Acts of the Apostles says:

"He was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith."

What a beautiful description.

Not clever.
Not powerful.
Not famous.

A good man.

Filled with the Holy Spirit.

And because Barnabas is filled with the Holy Spirit,
he recognises the work of God.

He does not become jealous.

He does not try to control everything.

He rejoices.

He encourages.

He strengthens.

In fact his name means: **"Son of Encouragement."**

The Church needs people like that.

Every parish needs people like that.

People who help others become saints.

People who strengthen faith rather than weaken it.

People who build up rather than tear down.

And then Barnabas does something remarkable.

He goes looking for Saul.

The man who had once persecuted Christians.

The man many still distrusted.

Barnabas sees what God is doing in him.

He takes him by the hand and brings him into the life of the Church.

Without Barnabas,
humanly speaking,
we might never have heard so much about St Paul.

Barnabas recognises grace at work.

There is an important lesson there.

The saints often see possibilities where others only see problems.

They see what God can do with a person.

Not merely what that person has been.

That is how God sees us too.

Then in today's Gospel Jesus sends His disciples out.

Not with wealth.

Not with influence.

Not with political power.

He sends them with the Gospel.

"The kingdom of heaven is close at hand."

That was their message.

And it remains the Church's message today.

Not simply: be nice.

Not simply: be religious.

But: The Kingdom is near.

God is acting.

God is calling.

God desires your salvation.

That is exactly what Barnabas believed.

And that is exactly why the Church exists.

The Church is not primarily a building.

Not even a cathedral.

Beautiful as cathedrals are.

The Church exists to bring people to Jesus Christ.

To preach the Gospel.

To celebrate the sacraments.

To make saints.

And perhaps today is a good moment to remember what a cathedral actually represents.

A cathedral is not important because it is large.

It is important because it is a sign of unity.

One bishop.

One faith.

One Church.

Parishes spread across cities,
towns,
villages,
and countryside.

Different cultures.

Different backgrounds.

Different personalities.

Yet one Church.

One Body of Christ.

And perhaps that matters more than ever now.

Because the world constantly pulls people apart.

Politics divides.

Social media divides.

Arguments divide.

The Church gathers.

Around Christ.

Around the Gospel.

Around the altar.

And so today we give thanks for St Barnabas.

A man full of faith.

A man full of encouragement.

A man who helped build the early Church.

And we give thanks for our cathedral church dedicated in his honour.

But most of all we give thanks for what both remind us of:

That the Church exists to proclaim Jesus Christ.

To call sinners to conversion.

To strengthen the faithful.

To make saints.

And that work continues today.

In Nottingham.

In our parishes.

In our homes.

And in every heart willing to hear once again the message Barnabas preached:

The Kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.