

Feast of Saint Matthias
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Today is the Feast of Saint Matthias. Not much is known about him other than what is told to us in the Acts of the Apostles. However, in this short passage about him we can deduce a number of things. First, he was a model disciple of Jesus otherwise the Eleven would not have considered him as a brother Apostle. Matthias was a witness to the Risen Lord because that was one of the prerequisites of being an Apostle. Matthias was willing to accept this new vocation even though it would likely lead to his martyrdom and death. Which in my mind makes him a heroic person.

However, I think it should be noted that all of this was true about his contender, Joseph also called Barsabbas. If you ever have been an employer, you know what it is like to have two excellent résumés in front of you and you can only pick one. That the Holy Spirit influenced the Eleven to select Matthias does not mean that Barsabbas failed by any means. It just meant that he was not called to that particular vocation. I wonder though where their lives went from there. We don't know much more about them. There is a legend about Matthias evangelizing in Cappadocia. There is another legend of him evangelizing in Ethiopia. He is believed to have died by being stoned followed by beheading. And, from there, became a patron saint for alcoholics, carpenters, and tailors. Who knew?

What is the end of the story for Joseph also called Barsabbas? A legend has it is that his nickname was Justus because he was well known as a just person and a model of what it means to be follower of Jesus. And, although not picked to be an Apostle, he continued his ministry as a bishop, and evangelized an area called Eleutheropolis, which was about 30 miles south of Jerusalem. Like so many Christian leaders of his day, he was martyred there for proclaiming the Gospel and is venerated under the name of St. Justus of Eleutheropolis.

How is any of this history helpful for us today? For me, it boils down to this simple observation. Matthias, Barsabbas, Peter, Andrew, James, John...pick any of them. We would not know one thing about them if it weren't for their relationship with Jesus Christ. Without their connection to Jesus, we would know absolutely nothing about them. The same can be said of so many people throughout history. Even in my own family tree, I have never met any of my great great grandparents. All I know is that two of my great great grandparents were homesteaders in Montana who spoke German and were devout Catholics. And because they were Catholic, even though I never met them, I know them because I have received my faith in part from them. Get it? It is therefore my job now to do the same for future generations. If the faith gets passed on to future generations and they live it, then they will know something about me as well.

You see, my friends, as Church we receive our faith in part from the witness of people like Matthias and Barsabbas. And so, the decision of who gets the title "Apostle" was clearly not the most important moment in the Acts of the Apostles. Feast Days like today give us an opportunity to give thanks to all those in our history who have passed on the faith to us, many times by the witness of offering their lives for the Gospel. Our mission now is to pay it forward.