

5th Sunday of Easter, Cycle C: May 1 & 2, 2010

Today, we witness a journey of evangelization that was made by Paul & Barnabas as they left Antioch to spread the Gospel. But, if we were to view their journey through the cynical mindset of our modern age, we might find ourselves asking the question: "What was in it for them?" Now my answer to that question might startle some, because I believe they made their journey out of love. Not just for the love of God, but for love of the people who were yet to hear the message of salvation brought into the world by Christ.

Their journey is usually referred to as the "1st Journey of Paul" in the Acts of the Apostles and it traces their route across the southern and central regions of modern day Turkey and the island of Cyprus. They are seen as leaving their home base of Antioch, which would be in modern Syria, and taking their message to the Gentiles. It was from this missionary center that Paul made two (2) other "journeys" before dying a martyr's death in Rome.

Even today, the delivery or rather attempted delivery of Christ's message in that part of the world can be life threatening. It wasn't that long ago that a priest was shot to death in Istanbul in retaliation for the depiction of Mohammed in a Dutch newspaper. There is also continued economic discrimination against "people of the book", i.e. Jews & Christians, in some Islamic countries. And even the recitation of today's responsorial response, "I will praise your name forever, my king and my God", carries with it a risk of persecution and murder some 2,000 years after the death of Jesus.

Amid all of this, our mission is still clearly defined for us by Jesus in today's Gospel as he gives us a new commandment: "love one another." But notice that we don't have to be on an evangelist's journey to fulfill that message. We can begin to do so right under our own roofs and around our kitchen or dining room tables. From there, we can then reach out to others who are poor, hungry or homeless within our communities before going forth into the world at large.

Now, it may seem strange to some for a former Airborne Infantry Officer to be speaking of love, but to a certain extent that is what all warriors are called to do. They apply the military arts through strategy and tactics in hope of protecting the interests of our nation and the lives of our people prior to the outbreak of hostilities. But, once engaged in hostilities, military doctrine will apply proportionate force to shorten and eventually end any conflict so that one can then go about building a peaceful environment. And, I know from personal experience that there isn't a more respectful and charitable defender of life, especially that of children, than the GI, the infantryman, the "grunt". Furthermore, on numerous occasions our troops have laid down their lives for one another and in a more distant way for each and every one of us in this room. And they do this out of love and certainly not for the meager wages that we pay them to go and stand in harm's way upon behalf of our nation.

No, they are doing what their nation has asked them to do, out of love. Love for their country, their families, for people they will never see and for one another. And we are asked to unite our personal testimony with theirs at the command of Jesus to love one another just as he loved us by the giving of his life for our salvation.