

Homily based on the readings from May 19, 2025 (Acts 14.5-18; John 14.21-26)

Human beings have an almost *supernatural* ability to come to the wrong conclusions. Today's first reading provides a classic example of this phenomenon. The Apostles Paul and Barnabas, as they were visiting the city of Lystra, happened to heal a man who had been "lame from birth." Even though this action was not especially unusual in the context of the early Church, the residents of Lystra *simply* could not comprehend what had taken place. The only way they could make *any* sense of this event was by *forcing* it into the framework of their pagan beliefs: "they cried out ... 'The gods have come down to us in human form.' They called Barnabas 'Zeus' and Paul 'Hermes.'" In fact, the crowd could barely be "restrained ... from offering sacrifice to them."

If the issues at stake were not so serious, this situation would seem like the basis for some sort of comedy sketch. Paul and Barnabas, however, were not even slightly amused. They "tore their garments" and shouted

at the residents of Lystra. From their perspective, the townspeople were committing an act of *unspeakable* blasphemy. They were willfully confusing the created with the creator, the human with the divine.

From our vantage point, it would be easy to dismiss the residents of Lystra as being hopelessly ignorant. Doing so, however, would be an act of *incredible* hubris. While we may not be susceptible to the *specific* errors of that time and place, we are just as likely to be blinded by our own biases and preconceptions. We need to be honest with ourselves: if we encountered an actual miracle in our own lives, how would *we* react? Would we try to *rationalize* it in terms of our so-called scientific certainties? Would we try to *subordinate* it to our modern political ideologies? Would we simply ignore it altogether? The point is that human beings – regardless of our tribe, tongue, people, or nation – have an *irresistible* urge to redefine anything that transcends our limited understanding in terms that we find *comfortable* and *familiar*.

The remedy for this affliction, of course, cannot be obtained through intellectual effort. We will never be capable of understanding even a *fraction* of the accumulated store of human knowledge, let alone the *infinite* truth that is perceptible to God alone. Nevertheless, that is not what God is expecting from us. What he is *calling* us to do is to view the world – first and foremost – through the lens of our relationship with *him*. To quote Saint Paul: “For I resolved to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” The truth is not a *concept*, not an *idea*, but a *person*. As we heard Christ proclaim in this past Friday’s Gospel: “I am the *way* and the *truth* and the *life*.” No matter how wise or how learned we think we are, the only way to *understand* the truth is to the *know* the Truth – not through any insight or ingenuity on *our* part, but by surrendering *ourselves*, fully and unconditionally, to his infinite love and mercy.