

Homily based on the readings from June 11, 2025 (Acts 11.21b-26, 13.1-3; Matthew 5.17-19)

As you are probably aware, today is the Memorial of Saint Barnabas the Apostle, one of the Church's earliest missionaries and Saint Paul's original partner in ministry. In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the two men setting out on the first of their journeys – which would wind up taking both of them far and wide across the Eastern Mediterranean. There is another important beginning, though, that is described in today's reading – the invention of a *word* that had never been used before: that word is *Christian*.

Prior to this point, the followers of Christ were typically referred to as the *Way*. Although Scripture does not make this observation explicitly, it is commonly believed that the term *Christian* was originally intended as an insult. If that is the case, the fact that the disciples so quickly adopted this title – which, of course, we still use today – was almost certainly an example of them embracing their own unpopularity.

That is an important lesson for us to remember. Even in today's society, the term *Christian* – at least in the abstract – is mostly viewed in a positive light. That situation has not always been the case, and – at some point in the future – it will certainly stop being the case again. Regardless of how the name is perceived, though, all of us need to remember that *being* a Christian always comes with a cost.

There is an anonymous epistle from the second century, that I have really come to love, which beautifully describes both the hardships and the joys of Christian life:

Christians love all men, but all men persecute them. Condemned because they are not understood, they are put to death, but raised to life again. They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse, deference their response to insult. For the good they do, they receive the punishment of

malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life. ... Such is the Christian's lofty and divinely appointed function, from which he is not permitted to excuse himself.

In other words, persecution in the name of Christ is not an anomaly, not a distraction, but the *way* Christians give witness to the truth.

There is another sense to the word *Christian* that we also need to remember. It is no accident that the words *Christ* and *Chrism* sound so similar. *Chrism* is the oil of anointing and *Christ* is the one who *is* anointed – as Prophet, Priest, and King. Every one of us who bears the name of Christian has been anointed as well – anointed *by* Christ and anointed *for* Christ. We may not live in the same world as Paul and Barnabas, and we may not be entrusted with the same type of ministry, but *each* of us has been called to testify to the eternal truth of Jesus Christ – everywhere we go, in everything we do, every single day of our lives.