



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

7th Sunday of Easter - Year B

St Joseph Barsabbas Justus

Readings: Acts 1: 15-17, 20-26, Ps 102, 1 John 4: 11-16, John 17: 11-19

I must have read it an hundred times. Two guys going for the same job, the same unexpected vacancy. Equally well qualified. Both been around since the unpromising beginnings of this multi-national corporation. Both knew the boss well and were men trusted by the board of directors. You would expect a presentation of a lavish CV, a detailed formal interview, perhaps even a power point presentation. A long agonising wait while the interview panel weighed it all up. After all it's one of the most important appointments in history.

In the appointment of the new Apostle, Judas' replacement, we see none of that. We know only that these two good and faithful guys have been around since the outset. They are trusted. We do not know if they were of the Seventy sent out by Jesus but it seems likely. They proposed and the momentous decision is made - by prayer and drawing lots !!!

(I have only ever encountered this method of selection once in my Christian life and that was in the Balkans where the Patriarchate of Serbia was thus determined. The more significant candidate lost but the appointment of the lesser man turned out to be providential. Perhaps

God really does know best. Anyway it seems, in retrospect to me, to have been a better system than the Crown Appointments Commission.)

The lot for Apostleship fell on Matthias – of whom we know remarkably little thereafter. Various traditions see him ministering and missioning in a variety of places but martyrdom in Georgia seems the likely end for the man from the subs' bench.

What has always intrigued me is not Matthias but Joseph Barsabbas Justus, the man whose lot was not chosen, the man who did not make it into the calendar of saints, the faithful follower who is not recorded in the canon or remembered in the liturgy of the Church. What happened to the dis-appointed or rather the 'not appointed'.

It is easy to allow the failure of our most noble human ambitions to become a locus of continuing grief and eventually bitterness. But that is not the Faith. I remember at school when three of us were up for Head Boy. Only one name would go on the historic board, only one of us remembered. The choice went to the nicest of the three of us, the least angular, the least pushy, the least academic. You guessed that it wasn't me.

The new Head Boy was the right choice and once we had got over ourselves, the 'disappointed' rallied and made a great team. The chosen went on to become a caring, successful and talented headmaster of a notable school. We remained friends, rejoicing in each other's triumphs and sympathetic to each other's griefs. His is the name that is on the

memorial board and defines the best of our year. And that is as it should be.

What intrigues me about Joseph Barsabbas Justus is that, in all the years of reading this story I had always felt for him but never bothered to find out what happened next. Did he accept the outcome as the will of God? Did he sulk? Did he walk away resentful that all his years of faithful service should have been set at naught by this random injustice? Or did he support the winning candidate, rally round, see where he could serve next and best? Was he more interested in the triumph of the Universal Church than his rank in it? Was he faithful to Jesus?

It is, as it turns out, a simple story. This member of Christ's original missionary posse of the 'Seventy' – mirroring the same support team of Moses – did not stray far from home. According to Christian tradition Joseph became the overseer or bishop of the little town of Betaris, some 30 miles south west of Jerusalem, straddling the Gaza road. There he remained ministering quietly for over thirty years until, in the Jewish revolt, the armies of Vespasian slaughtered their way to the gates of Jerusalem. The little town of Betaris was obliterated, its inhabitants butchered. Saint Joseph Justus martyred.

Oh yes....Joseph did not make it on to the universal calendar but he is still venerated as a local saint – ironically under the title of St. Justus of Eleutheropolis, the later Roman title for the important city that was eventually built on the ruins. The name means, 'The City of the Free'. Eleutheropolis remains a titular see of the Universal Church.

St. Justus reminds us that what truly matters in the final scheme of things is neither appointment nor disappointment but whether we got on with the job in the places where God has put us.

Saint Joseph Justus.....pray for us.

© 2018 Fowey Retreat