

Fourth Wednesday of Easter ~ 5/2

"Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" (Acts 12:1-2)

What happened in the church at Antioch that day? Did a voice boom out from above with the directive that Saul and Barnabas were to be given a mission? Since there were no telephones or e-mails at the time we know that there was no instant messaging taking place. There was no live interview with the Spirit on CNN. It didn't seem that the two men had been picked because they were politically popular, so how did this word of the Spirit come to the people of the church?

Perhaps to understand how this message was heard it would be good to look at what the people in the church were doing right before the Spirit spoke. The writer of Acts tells us that they were worshipping and fasting. Worshipping tells us that these people were trying to be in a right relationship with God. The fasting indicates that they were trying to clear their hearts and minds of everything in order to be aware of any subtle movement of God within or around them. These two steps are important for anyone who would have a listening and discerning heart.

Worshipping God does not begin with asking the Spirit for guidance. It begins with claiming that God is God and that we are not. To worship God is to place ourselves in the shadow of God. To acknowledge the supreme power and goodness of God before asking for guidance makes it clear that we truly need the enlightenment that is greater than any personal insights we may have.

Fasting can take on a myriad of dimensions. Certainly it can mean abstaining from food and drink but it can also mean disciplining oneself so that the distractions of the world around us cannot cloud the words of the Spirit. This is important because the voice of the Spirit most often does not come with a boom or a lot of razzle-dazzle but often very softly. Fasting helps our interior ears pick up the sound of the Spirit's fire even before we see it.

We don't know exactly how the words of the Spirit came to these early followers but we know that they were prepared to hear the words because they had made themselves ready. If we would know the will and direction of the Spirit in our lives perhaps we too will find it essential to engage in worship and fasting.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. How often do I worship God before asking God for something?*
- 2. What distractions do I need to block out in order to hear God's word to me?*

Prayer: Jesus Christ, we believe with all our hearts and minds and souls that you are the King of Kings. Send your Spirit to help us live accordingly.