

**April 17, 2016 Fidelity & Success Homily:** Brothers and sisters, many of us remember Mother Teresa with great affection and gratitude for her extraordinary Christian life. Only recently she was declared a saint by the Church, a decision met with wide acclaim. A Missionary of Charity, she labored for many years in the slums of Calcutta, India, among the poorest of the poor. She brought comfort and peace to the sick and dying. Near the end of her life she was interviewed by a journalist, who shared with the nun one observation. "Mother, although you have labored for Jesus many years in the slums, it seems that, for all your heroic efforts, you can boast of few converts to the Christian faith. Do you consider yourself a failure". Mother Teresa smiled. "Friend, I am not called to be successful. I am only called to be faithful. I am simply a small pencil in the hands of Our Lord. What we do is nothing but a drop in the ocean. But if we didn't do it, the ocean would be one less drop".

The Acts of the Apostles shows us the Christian community in the first years following the events of Easter. The book reads like a thriller or adventure story. It leaves you breathless. One of the key figures in Acts is a Jewish convert, St. Paul. In the first reading, Paul and his companion, Barnabas come to Antioch, a city with a large Jewish population.

In view of his Jewish background, it was the custom of Paul to visit the local synagogue in those towns and villages that he visited. It is interesting to note that in today's first reading, the Evangelist informs us that "almost the whole town gathered" to hear Paul preach (Acts 13:44). "And he spoke out fearlessly"(Acts 13:36). After some early interest, the Jews of Antioch reject the message that Paul had brought. We then read Paul's pointed response: "It was necessary that the Word of God be spoken to you first, but since YOU REJECT IT and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life we now turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Paul and Barnabas were then expelled from the territory (Acts 13:50). "So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium" (Acts 13:51).

The proclamation of the Word of God has no promise of success. The seed sometimes falls on rocky terrain. Nevertheless, the Word must be proclaimed, regardless of the consequences. Paul is obliged to be faithful to his calling. When the Christian message is rejected in one place, it is carried to another. Paul had much greater success with the Gentiles (non-Jews), as is made clear in today's first reading (Acts 13:48).

That the proclamation of the gospel fails to find a receptive audience is particularly evident in our own time. The Western world has largely rejected the Christian gospel. In many so-called Christian countries, fewer than ten percent of baptized Catholics attend Sunday mass. In many parts of the West, the faith is moribund. Where the gospel continues to bear abundant fruit today are in Africa and Asia.

In many families today, baptized Christians are either indifferent to the faith or have abandoned Christianity for another religion, occasionally an exotic one. So often the faithful blame themselves for the failures of their loved ones. But, as Mother Teresa reminds us, we are called to be faithful, and not necessarily successful. All the Lord expects of us is our Christian witness. There is only one savior! May our zeal for proclaiming and witnessing to the truths of our faith never waver and may we not be disheartened if all our efforts seem to come up empty.

Jesus lives!