

May 19, 2019 God At Work In Us Homily: Arguably, one of the most celebrated and respected monarchs in the history of the English nation is King Henry V, who lived in the first half of the fifteenth century. Thanks to the literary giant, William Shakespeare, this great ruler is immortalized in one of his historical plays. A talented soldier and first rate commander, Henry is best remembered for leading his troops into battle against French forces in the Battle of Agincourt. He won a decisive victory in one of the defining moments of a protracted war. Wishing to honor their ruler for his great achievement, the subjects of his realm hoped to offer him praise in word and song. The king protested mightily. "All the glory must be given to God, and God alone", he declared. He refused to take credit for the defeat of the enemy. His Christian faith taught him the importance of humility. He died of natural causes at the young age of thirty-six.

In today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 14:21-27), a chronicle of the early Christian church, Paul and Barnabas have completed their first missionary journey. Clearly, they enjoyed some success. "After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news to that city and made a considerable number of disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch". (Acts 14:21) In Antioch, one of the largest cities of the ancient world, Paul and Barnabas call the church together and report what God had done for them and through them to open up the doors of faith to the Gentiles. It is not without significance that they point out that it was God, and not their own missionary strategy, that had opened the door of faith to the heathen peoples of the region. (Acts 14:27) Their focus is what God achieved for them rather than their own successes. The true disciple recognizes that God's invisible hand is at work in directing his Church.

Among the great Catholic evangelist of the last century, few were as prominent or as successful as Bishop Fulton Sheen. In his heyday he was dubbed the "convert-maker" because of his extraordinary achievements in drawing the rich and the famous into the fold of the Church. Once, he had a private audience with Pope Pius XII, who was certainly aware of Sheen's triumphs as a preacher and teacher of the Catholic faith. He was inspired to ask the bishop a pointed question "How many converts have you made in your life?" Sheen answered, "Your Holiness, I have never counted them. I am always afraid if I did count them, I might think that I made them, instead of the Lord." We begin to have the right and proper idea of God when we work, not for our own honor and glory, but from the conviction that we are living instruments in the hands of our living God.

How much credit do we give to God? Do we count our blessings? Do we attribute all our triumphs and achievements to our own natural abilities, and simply ignore the many graces afforded us by Holy Spirit to accomplish our mission in life?

Perhaps we can learn a valuable lesson from our nation's sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln. Before leaving for Washington, where he would serve the American people as Commander-in-Chief and Head of State, he confided to a friend his view that without God's help he could not possibly succeed in office.

Apparently Paul and Barnabas felt the same way.

Amen!