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## *Barsabbas and Matthias: The Patron Saints of Elections*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**

In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:23-26), we read of the earliest record of choosing apostolic leaders in the Christian Church. The apostles are gathered in Jerusalem seeking to do the right thing for the continuation of their identity and ministry. According to Luke, the writer of Acts, the apostles needed a twelfth member. So, first they chose the finalists. They chose two nominees from among all the people who had been with them from the beginning, nominees who would be authentic witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. They nominated Barsabbas and Matthias. They prayed. Then, they simply chose lots!

This week in the United States of America, I want to salute those two men, who were willing to let their names go forward in the church's first election process: Barsabbas and Matthias. For me, these two saints are the patron saints of elections!

Like any nominee of this age, they were willing to be public with their possibility. Each one knew, I am sure, that he might not be chosen. But they were honored. More importantly, they were willing to be vulnerable, to be exposed, to be critiqued and analyzed.

These days, this is a key feature of public nomination: the willingness to be vulnerable. That is what any candidate does. They are willing to be public, willing to make an offering of themselves for the greater common good. That means sacrificing some privacy, letting people comment, letting people ask all sorts of questions.

In fact, it means sacrificing a lot of privacy! Hard campaigning nominees know that people are saying all sorts of things about them. Some of it is accurate and true and good. Some of it is downright inaccurate and misleading and even pernicious. But that is the way of human curiosity, human speculation, and human sin. And it is certainly the way of human politics.

Maybe the most important thing that nominees share, then, even though they rarely say this exactly, is a willingness to lose. They share a willingness to lose.

Good people who offer themselves for election always know that there is a distinct possibility that they will lose the election. I believe that is an important offering to any democratic commonwealth: the offering of loss. The offering that, yes, I might lose. And that will be okay.

For me, Barsabbas and Matthias, those first two nominees for apostolic leadership in the church, are the patron saints of elections. I suppose that they both knew they might not be chosen. But they let their names stand, anyway.

And the name of Barsabbas was not chosen. He, then, might be called the patron saint of losers! According to the record of history, he lost. Alas, this is the only time in the New Testament that his name is even mentioned. There is a small legend about what might have happened to him, but nothing of any substance. He lost, and nothing more is heard about him.

I salute Barsabbas this week, about whom we know nothing more than that he lost the election. He is the patron saint of losers.

But, here's the thing. What about the winner, the man whose name was chosen? What about Matthias, whose name was chosen, by lot, who became the twelfth apostle? Is he, therefore, to be remembered as the patron

saint of winners?

Well, it turns out that, alas, this is the only time in the New Testament that his name is even mentioned, too! With him, too, there is a small legend about what might have happened to him, but nothing of any substance. He actually won, and yet nothing more is heard about him.

Barsabbas lost, and nothing more is heard about him. Matthias won, and nothing more is heard about him, either! Whether they won or lost, nothing more was heard about them. They began an apostolic succession, they participated in leadership, but their lives were not remembered. Maybe, apostolic Christian leadership is not about being remembered individually; maybe it's about being part of the greater common good!

This week, I salute all those who offer themselves for service, whether it is in the church, or elsewhere, for the common good. You who run for election anywhere, you who want to be leaders, you who sacrifice your privacy for the greater good anywhere. Your willingness to lose is, actually, a good example to all of us. To follow in the steps of the apostles is to be willing to lose yourself. To be willing to lose is the best form of Christian leadership. Christian leadership is being willing to lose.

Christian leadership witnesses to something beyond individual identity, beyond individual pride, beyond whether one wins or loses.

Finally, in Christ, there are no winners or losers. There is only the Body of Christ, with its many faithful members. The words of the blessed apostle Paul are the words of a true leader: "We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so, then, whether we live or whether we die; we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:7-8).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Sam Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip