



Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul



Date: Saturday, January 25, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Acts 9:1-22

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1bc, 2 | **Response:** Mark 16:15

Gospel Acclamation: John 15:16

Gospel Reading: Mark 16:15–18

Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

This morning we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, a profound moment of grace that transformed a zealous persecutor of Christians into one of the greatest apostles of Christ. This story, recounted in Acts 9:1–22, is not only about Paul's conversion but also an invitation for us to reflect on our own journeys of faith and transformation.

Paul, born Saul, was a Pharisee deeply committed to the Mosaic Law. His zeal drove him to persecute the early Christian community, viewing it as a threat to his faith. However, on the road to Damascus, Saul's life was radically changed. A light from heaven surrounded him, and he heard the voice of Jesus say: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Blinded and humbled, he was led into Damascus, where Ananias, a disciple of the Lord, healed him and baptized him. This encounter with Christ marked the beginning of his new mission—to become the Apostle to the Gentiles.

St. Paul's story can be illuminated through the lens of Bernard Lonergan's understanding of conversion—intellectual, moral, and religious—each deepening and complementing the others in a transformative way.

The Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan, in his "Method in Theology," describes intellectual conversion as a "shift from self-centered to truth-centered knowing," calling us to align our understanding with reality as it truly is, not as we assume it to be. Moral conversion, he explains, is "a shift from self-satisfaction to value," where our decisions and actions reflect a commitment to the good, even

at personal cost. Religious conversion, the climax of transformation, is “a falling in love with God in an unrestricted way,” a surrender to divine grace that reshapes every dimension of our lives.

Paul’s intellectual conversion is evident in his recognition that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. His moral conversion is seen in his shift from a life of violence and persecution to one of selfless service and love. Finally, his religious conversion is the most profound—a radical reorientation of his entire being toward God, rooted in his encounter with the risen Christ.

Paul’s conversion was unique and monumental for Christianity both then and now. His encounter with Christ was not just a personal transformation; it was a pivotal moment for the early Church. Paul became the bridge between Jewish and Gentile believers, articulating the Gospel in ways that transcended cultural and religious boundaries. His conversion reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God’s grace and that even our most misguided zeal can be redirected for God’s greater glory. Today, Paul’s writings continue to inspire and guide the Church, emphasizing salvation through faith and the universality of Christ’s message, a message that challenges us in our own conversion and invites us to embrace Christ’s mission.

The readings today beautifully reflect the theme of conversion and mission. The reading from the Acts of the Apostles recounts Paul’s dramatic encounter with Christ, demonstrating the boundless mercy of God who calls even the most unlikely to serve His purpose. The Gospel reminds us of our mission to proclaim the Good News, a mission that begins with our own openness to God’s transforming grace. Both readings highlight the centrality of God’s grace, which empowers and sustains our response to His call. We might think in our own life what conversions we have had the grace to experience in the past, and which ones we might pray for the grace to experience in the future. Practically, we can foster these conversions through regular prayer, reflection, and dialogue.

Through prayer, we open ourselves to intellectual conversion—allowing God to shape our understanding. Through reflection on our lives, we move toward moral conversion, aligning our actions with God’s will. And in dialogue with God, we deepen our religious conversion, falling ever more deeply in love with Him.

Engaging with Scripture, participating in the sacraments, and seeking spiritual guidance are essential practices. We can also examine our daily choices, asking how they reflect our commitment to truth, goodness, and God's will. The practice of talking with a spiritual director, and praying the examen, can help us in this quest.

Paul's story challenges us to recall our own moments of conversion. These may not be as dramatic as Paul's, but they are no less significant. Perhaps it was a moment of clarity in prayer, a time of reconciliation, or a deepened awareness of God's presence in our lives. Conversion is not a one-time event; it is a continuous process of turning toward God. As religious, we are called to remain open to this ongoing transformation, allowing God to shape us more fully into instruments of His love.

In light of today's feast, we might ask ourselves: What moments of conversion have shaped your relationship with God? How is He calling you to deeper transformation and mission today?

As we celebrate this feast, let us also take to heart the Jubilee of Hope proclaimed by the Holy Father this year, renewing our commitment to be ambassadors of Christ's love and mercy. Let us also pray fervently for unity during this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, that all followers of Christ may be one, as He and the Father are one.

And as we celebrate the Feast of St. Paul, let us pray for the grace to answer God's call in our own lives, to be instruments of His mercy, and to bring His hope and love to others.

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