



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



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School Mass
1/25/08

Today the Church celebrates the Conversion of St. Paul, an event which had the greatest consequences for the spread of Christianity. As we prepare to celebrate this Mass, let us acknowledge the need for conversion in our lives and ask God to help us see the direction we should go.

The story of Paul's experience of God on the road to Damascus is one of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament. It transformed him from persecution of those newly converted from Judaism to Christianity to a strong and enduring commitment to Christ. It is no accident that this time of the year is chosen for the week of special prayer for Christian Unity; the week January 18 - 25 culminates in the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, and Paul was God's instrument for proclaiming that salvation was meant for all people, not just those of a chosen race. As far as a share in the salvation won by Jesus Christ is concerned, we are all equal, men and women, young and old, white or colored, Jew or Gentile. Our "conversion" took place at our baptism. But most of us were babies; we didn't know what was going on; we were unable to make a commitment to a new way of life. We need a commissioning after we have reached the age of reason, and that is what the sacrament of Confirmation is about. Today's gospel, which is a supplement to the end of the gospel of Mark, shows that being commissioned by the risen Lord brings us a share in his extraordinary powers. The charismatic gifts described here are manifestations of God's presence among his people -- they will cast out devils, they will have the gift of tongues, they will be unharmed by snakes or poison, they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover.

Paul's experience of the Lord on the road to Damascus was his commissioning, his confirmation. Everything that Paul says and does from this time onwards is permeated by the conviction that he is loved by Christ. This is the driving force of the rest of his life. To be separated from that love was, in his eyes, the worst possible torment. Without



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that love, it would be no satisfaction to be the friend of those who possess worldly power. In the knowledge of being loved by Christ, Paul thought of himself as possessing life, possessing the kingdom promised by God. But all of this is God's gift, God's grace: "By God's grace, I am what I am." "Now not I, but Christ lives in me." It was this conviction that enabled Paul to show us, better than any other writer, what man really is, in what our nobility consists and what we are capable of. He has a special insight into human nature. Paul is forward looking, facing each day with new eagerness the challenges and dangers that threatened him. "I forget what is behind and push on to what lies ahead." And he places his confidence in God's power: "Thanks be to God who is always victorious in us."

We have a lot to learn from St. Paul. So much of what he wrote about and taught is applicable to our daily lives. Although our Damascus road experience may not be as dramatic as was Paul's, may we pray for that same conviction that he had that we are loved by Christ, and allow it to transform our lives. +