

PART TWO Forty Days Of Reflection

A CONVERTED MAN

Paul's conversion—from being a devout and strictly Orthodox Jew to being a follower of Jesus Christ—was so dramatic mostly because Paul had so very far to go, spiritually speaking. He went from hunting down the followers of Jesus, to becoming not only one of them, but also the “Apostle to the Gentiles.” Paul always recognized these dramatic contrasts in his encouraging epistles to the early churches, and he saw his conversion as an example of God's tremendous grace.

It happened that I was on that journey and nearly at Damascus when in the middle of the day a bright light from heaven suddenly shone round me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” I answered, “Who are you, Lord?” and he said to me, “I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.”

—Acts 22:6–8

Remembering the Apostle Paul

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

The Apostle Paul, being formerly Saul, was changed from a robbing wolf into a meek lamb. He had been an enemy of the Church, but became manifest as an Apostle. Formerly he stalked it, then he preached it. He received from the high priests the authority at large to throw all Christians in chains for execution. “Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord’s disciples” (Acts 9:1). He thirsted for blood, but, “the LORD has them in derision” (Psalm 2:4). When he, having persecuted and vexed in such manner “the Church of God” (1 Corinthians 15:9), Paul came to Damascus and the Lord from Heaven called to him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? (Acts 9:5)” I am here, and I am there, I am everywhere: here is My head; there is My body. None of this should surprise us, since we ourselves are members of the Body of Christ. . . .

The Lord directed the Apostle Paul into the things he had to suffer for His Name. He instructed him as to the deeds; He did not stop at the chains, the fetters, the prisons, and shipwrecks; He Himself felt for him in his sufferings, and He guided him towards this day. On a single day we remember the sufferings of both of these Apostles [both St. Peter and St. Paul, on June 29]. Although they suffered on separate days, by the spirit and the closeness of their suffering they constitute one. Peter went first, Paul followed soon after him. Formerly called Saul, having transformed in himself his pride into humility, he became Paul. His very name, Paulus, means “small, little, less.” What is the Apostle

Paul after this? Ask him, and he himself gives answer: “I am,” he says, “the least of the Apostles. . . . Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others—not I, but the grace of God which is with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9–10).⁷

ST. AUGUSTINE is the most important of the Latin Church Fathers. His two books, the Confessions and The City of God, were two of the most important books in the first thousand years of Christianity. Like Paul, Augustine was an adult convert to Christianity, and he became the bishop of Hippo, in northern Africa. He wrote many sermons and apologetic writings against the various heresies that were prevalent in those days. This sermon was probably written around the year AD 400, and is used to demonstrate that as early as the late fourth century, Christians were celebrating a joint feast day for Saints Peter and Paul.

REFLECT

Although our experiences of Christ may not have been as dramatic as Paul’s was, it is encouraging to cherish and rehearse the moments of transformation that we have experienced. Looking back over your life, at what points in time have you *turned* toward Christ? Where is he asking you to turn today?

Day 2

Paul “accommodated [him]self to people in all kinds of different situations (1 Corinthians 9:22)” in his effort to reach people of different backgrounds with the message of Christ. He was already a Hebrew, a Roman citizen, and a Greek—with an understanding of Hellenistic culture and philosophy. He used all of these aspects of himself as tools to do the work of spreading the Good News. He saw no shame in emphasizing different aspects of himself, in his preaching and witness. In one instance, for example, he began relating with a group of people simply on the level of sharing the same craft:

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, where he met a Jew called Aquila whose family came from Pontus. He and his wife Priscilla had recently left Italy because an edict of Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome. Paul went to visit them, and when he found they were tentmakers, of the same trade as himself, he lodged with them, and they worked together.

—Acts 18:1–3.

So though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in slavery to all people, to win as many as I could. To the Jews I made myself as a Jew, to win the

Jews; to those under the Law as one under the Law (though I am not), in order to win those under the Law; to those outside the Law as one outside the Law, though I am not outside the Law but under Christ's law, to win those outside the Law. To the weak, I made myself weak, to win the weak. I accommodated myself to people in all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring some to salvation. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, that I may share its benefits with others. Do you not realise that, though all the runners in the stadium take part in the race, only one of them gets the prize? Run like that—to win.

—1 Corinthians 9:19–24

*A Leader should be Near to His Neighbors
Out of Compassion*
ST. GREGORY THE GREAT

The pastor should be a near neighbor to every one in sympathy, and exalted above all in contemplation, so that through the depths of loving-kindness he may transfer the infirmities of others to himself, and transcend even himself in his aspiration after the invisible. . . . So it is that St. Paul bends in his compassion upon the secrets of those who are subject to infirmity. In contemplation he transcends heaven, and yet he doesn't desert the troubles of those in need. Being joined at once to the highest and to the lowest by the bond of charity, though in himself caught up in the power of the spirit into the heights

above, in his loving-kindness, he reaches others, content to be weak. Hence he says, “If anyone weakens, I am weakened as well; and when anyone is made to fall, I burn in agony myself” (2 Corinthians 11:29). Again he says, “To the Jews I made myself as a Jew” (1 Corinthians 9:20).

He didn’t exhibit this behavior by losing hold of his faith, but by extending his loving-kindness—by transferring in a figure the person of unbelievers to himself, to learn from himself how they ought to have compassion shown to them, to the end that he might bestow on them what he would have rightly wished to have had bestowed upon himself, were he as they. Again he says, “If we have been unreasonable, it was for God; if reasonable, for you” (2 Corinthians 5:13). For he had known how both to transcend himself in contemplation, and to accommodate himself to his hearers. . . .

True preachers not only aspire in contemplation to the holy head of the Church, that is to the LORD above, but they also descend in commiseration downward to His members. For this reason, Moses goes frequently in and out of the tabernacle, and he who is wrapped into contemplation within is busied outside with the affairs of those who are subject to infirmity. Within he considers the secret things of GOD; without he carries the burdens of the carnal. And also concerning doubtful matters he always recurs to the tabernacle, to consult the LORD before the ark of the covenant; affording without doubt an example to rulers; that, when in the outside world they are uncertain how to order things, they should return to their own soul

as though to the tabernacle, and, as before the ark of the covenant, consult the LORD, if so, they may search within themselves the pages of sacred utterance concerning that whereof they doubt. Similarly, Christ Himself, manifested to us through humility to our humanity, continues in prayer on the mountain, but works miracles in the cities (Luke 6:12), laying down the way to be followed by good rulers: Although already in contemplation aspiring to the highest things, they should mingle in sympathy with the necessities of those in need. True charity rises wonderfully to high things when it is compassionately drawn to the low things of neighbors; and the more kindly it descends to the weak things of this world, the more vigorously it recurs to the things on high.⁸

REFLECT

Paul gives us the example of a converted man who continued to pursue transformation so that he could relate God's loving-kindness to more and more people. Salvation was not enough for him. How have you seen your ongoing Christian conversion, or transformation, become a help in relating to and caring for others around you?

Day 3

Paul recognized that God's grace had brought him to faith—"I was appointed herald and apostle and . . . a teacher of the gentiles in faith and truth. In every place, then, I want the men to lift their hands up reverently in prayer . . ." (1 Timothy 2:7-8)—and he frequently asked others to join him in praying for God to move in the lives of others.

I urge then, first of all that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving should be offered for everyone, for kings and others in authority, so that we may be able to live peaceful and quiet lives with all devotion and propriety. To do this is right, and acceptable to God our Saviour: he wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth. For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus, who offered himself as a ransom for all. This was the witness given at the appointed time.

—1 Timothy 2:1-6