

Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, 25 Jan 2009

Acts 22:3-:16

Today we celebrate the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, and all of us should be able to do what we saw St. Paul do in our first reading today.

Paul could point to what his life had been like, speak about how God intervened in his life, and point to how he had changed as a result.

He had been a religiously observant Jew, knowledgeable in the Old Testament, but someone who thought that loyalty to the God of Israel meant rejecting the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

As a result he persecuted the Church seeking the arrest, imprisonment, and death of Christians. He was on his way to the city of Damascus to see that this work was done, when Jesus Christ appeared to him. Jesus revealed that he was God, to someone who had been persecuting those who believed in his divinity.

Paul then went on to be received by the members of the very church he had been persecuting, was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, and become not just a member of this community that claimed that loyalty to the God of the Old Testament demanded accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, but one of the boldest leaders and preachers within this church.

St. Paul was able to speak about who he had been, what God had done, and who he had become now.

We should all be able to do the same.

God has been active enough in my life that by his grace I'm able to do this. I can point to the fact that until near the end of high school I was indifferent to God, and had no

interest in anything that had anything at all to do with the Church. Then at first through the influence of high school and college friends who attended churches of a number of different denominations, and then through college classmates who really understood the teachings of the Catholic Church, I became someone who first realized my need for the salvation Christ offers to us. Then someone who saw that fidelity to Christ meant I was supposed to stay within the Catholic Church, which I had been raised in but had just never really cared about, and then a little about a year and a half after graduating from college I reached the point where I realized that God was calling me to serve as a priest.

The changes that God brings about in our lives don't have to be as dramatic or as sudden as those that were brought about in St. Paul's life. Sometimes God changes people over night, more often he works to gradually unite us to himself and form us into who he wants us to be.

But all of us need to be able to point to the differences that God has made and is making in our lives. If we aren't radically different than who we would be if Jesus Christ had never been born, then something is wrong.

Hopefully, everyone here can point to times in your life where God has acted to change and to shape you. If you can, then continue to allow him to do so. If you can't, then let him in.

All of us are called upon to follow the same basic pattern that we see in St. Paul's life. We need to encounter Jesus Christ, receive his grace, be transformed, and then bear witness to him and draw others towards following him and entrusting themselves to him more deeply.

God's intervention in our lives doesn't mean we won't have set backs and struggles.

St. Paul certainly did after his experience on the road to Damascus.

I certainly have during the various stages I've gone through in my life since I realized my need for God's grace.

But we can be transformed, we can be united to God.

This is what we celebrate as we remember the conversion of St. Paul, and we should be able to celebrate this very same thing, as we bear witness to the work of Jesus Christ in our own lives.