

## CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL 2019

### SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

#### ACTS 9.1-22

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*“Just like a blind man I wandered along... Worries and fears I claimed for my own... Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight... Praise the Lord I saw the light.”*

*“I was a fool to wander and a-stray... Straight is the gate and narrow the way... now I have traded the wrong for the right... Praise the Lord I saw the light.”*

It's April 1947. Legendary country gospel singer Hank Williams was inspired to write the words to the song while sleeping off a night of heavy drinking in the back seat of his mother's car. He was awakened when he heard his mother say, "I saw the light", as they approached Montgomery, Alabama, the sight of his next performance. Williams was plagued by years of alcohol and prescription drug abuse...the song is the prayer of a backslider seeking redemption.

Saul of Tarsus was a man who sought redemption by persecuting the Church. Acts of the Apostles records he went from house to house looking for followers of Jesus he could arrest and throw in jail. He was present and gave his approval to the murder of Saint Stephen. Saul the persecutor was about to meet his match...Jesus...and would become Paul the Apostle.

With the exception of Jesus...we know more about Saul than any other character in the New Testament. He was known by both his Hebrew name, Saul, and by his Latin name, Paul. He is traditionally considered the author of fourteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Half of Acts of the Apostles is devoted to the life and work of Paul...the Apostle to the Gentiles.

No one was better qualified to do God's work among the Gentiles than Paul. He was born in Tarsus, a city in Asia Minor, present day Turkey. He was a Roman citizen from the time he was born. This opened up for Paul educational opportunities not available for most Jews. He was a skilled professional whose services would have been in great demand wherever he traveled.

Paul's dramatic conversion while he was on his way to Damascus with arrest warrants was the epiphany...the *striking appearance*...that changed his life and the course of the Church forever. Paul indeed "saw the light"...and it plunged him into literal darkness...for three days he could not see...and Jesus told him to quit being so stubborn and listen to him. God was going to use him to build up the Church...not tear it down.

Jesus promised Paul his work would not be easy...he would have to suffer many things for his sake. He should expect to make great personal sacrifices. And while his persecution of the Church was over, but the real test of his faith was only just beginning.

Paul's status as both a Jew and a Roman citizen put him in a unique position to talk to both Jews and Gentiles in ways they understood. He began his work for the Church in the same synagogues he likely would have brought Christians to for trial and possible execution. He was not afraid to call Jesus the Messiah and God's Son. And he did not back down when he was challenged.

Paul's conversion was not a one-time event; it was a life-long process. From Paul's own struggles while he went about spreading the Good News we learn much about ourselves. We learn our own conversions are life-long experiences...and to never give up.

Sometimes we find ourselves in dark places before we can see the light. Sometimes we create those dark places...sometimes we're forced into them. When we think about the struggles in our own lives we should try to remember the people who have been epiphanies...*striking appearances*...for us and who have helped us navigate out of those dark places into the Light of Christ.

What makes Saint Paul such a credible witness...he was a human being just like us...who persevered in his work...even when things got tough. Saul the Church's spoiler became Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles...and it was his redemption. He traded the wrong for the right.

Our friend Paul saw the Light that is Jesus...and so can we! There's nothing keeping us from saying..."Praise the Lord...we see the Light!"

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