



St. Paul the Apostle, originally Saul of Tarsus, was persecuting the early Christians. While Paul was traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus on a mission to arrest the Christians, Jesus appeared to him in a great light. After his conversion he became Paul, the indefatigable Apostle of the Gentiles.

First Reading: (Acts 22:3-16) Paul said to the people, "I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. "As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by

those who were with me, and came into Damascus. "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Ps 116:1-2

R./ Go out to the whole world: proclaim the good news.

Gospel: (Mk 16:15-18) Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

REFLECTION

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Paul the apostle of Christ was probably brought about first of all through the prayer of St. Stephen: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," as he was being stoned to death under the supervision of Saul. As a result of this prayer, Saul received the gift of conversion from an act of God's forgiveness. Secondly, Paul's conversion was not the customary conversion from an immoral to a moral life, but from a false notion of a holy life to a true notion. He was a rigid, yet sincere man, as Pope Francis says. His rigid adherence to a false notion of a true follower of God that we are saved by our external adherence to all the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law, led him to be a fierce persecutor. His conversion was to the true notion that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Thirdly, in St. Paul's life we see that conversion was not a one-time event on the road to Damascus, but a continuous experience, triggered off with that encounter, as he continued to grow in the Gospel he was fearlessly and faithfully proclaiming. Fourthly, **Like Paul, all of us stand in need of constant conversion.**