

## **The Conversion of St. Paul**

### **1- Objectives:**

- ❖ To learn about the events that took place in St. Paul's life that led to his conversion.
- ❖ To understand the spiritual change that took place in his life and to apply it in our lives.

### **2- References:**

- ❖ Acts 7:57-60; Acts 8:1-3; Acts 22:3- 31, Philippians 3:3-6
- ❖ [http://www.suscopts.org/mightyangels/vol2\\_no1/stpaul.pdf](http://www.suscopts.org/mightyangels/vol2_no1/stpaul.pdf)

### **3- Scriptural Verse**

- ❖ "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20)

### **4- Lesson Outlines**

- ❖ St. Paul was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a group with political and ideological motives. They believed in a strict interpretation of the Law and they were highly influential among the general public.
- ❖ Prior to his conversion to Christianity, St. Paul was righteous according to the Law, zealous for his religion, obedient to the requirements of the Law, proud and energetic. He had knowledge about God but his heart was lacking in love and was willing to murder people out of his zeal to the religion of his fathers.
- ❖ After his conversion, he became a loving person, forgiving, humble and energetic. He intimately knew God and His mercies "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (2 Corinthians 11: 29)

### **How do I know that I am on the right path in my spiritual journey?**

- ❖ Be a Living Sacrifice (Romans 12:1); St. John Chrysostom said: "How is the body to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look on no evil thing, and it has become a sacrifice. Let your tongue speak nothing filthy, and it has become an offering. Let your hand do no lawless deed, and it has become a whole burnt offering. But this is not enough. We must have good works, also. Let the hand give alms, the mouth bless those who oppose one, and the hearing find solace in Divine teachings. For sacrifice allows no unclean things: sacrifice is a first-fruit of other actions. Let us then from our hands, our feet, our mouths, and all our other members, yield a first-fruit to God."
- ❖ Not Conforming to the world and being transformed in our minds (Romans 12: 2): The Church Fathers said: "world" refers to the passions or to attachment to the things of the senses; St. Isaac the Syrian said: "The world is the general name for all the passions." The passions are the love of riches, desire for possessions, bodily pleasure from which come sexual passion, love of honor which gives rise to envy, lust for power, arrogance and pride of position, the craving to adorn oneself with luxurious clothes and vain ornaments, the itch for human glory which is a source of anger and resentment, and physical fear. Where these passions cease to be active, there the world is dead. Someone

has said of the saints that while alive they were dead; for though living in the flesh, they did not live for the flesh

- ❖ The root of all passions is self-love according to the Church Fathers. It is the mother and nurse of all passions. It is the excessive concern for the body, and for comfort.

### **Self examination of thoughts and actions to recognize self-love that is within us?**

- ❖ Keeping a close watch on our thoughts in order to cut off sinful and impassioned thoughts.
- ❖ When we entertain a sinful thought, cherish it and develop it, it becomes sin and separates us from God. These thoughts lead to impassioned feelings which fuel more thoughts and soon we are caught in a habitual passion.
- ❖ To cut off sinful thoughts, we first must recognize such thoughts as our enemy.
- ❖ We must realize that they can separate us from God.
- ❖ Many times thoughts that fuel self-love are thoughts of worry about health, body, and physical appearance. If we turn our concern and thoughts to God we in essence cut off that thought before it turns into a passion (habitual action).
- ❖ We have a special means of cutting off thoughts: the Lord's Prayer.
- ❖ The Prayer helps us to cut off and turn away from impassioned thoughts.
- ❖ The Prayer helps us to keep Our Lord before us at all times.
- ❖ Always be watchful of your thoughts and pray often.

### **The Primary Mark of Spiritual Transformation**

- ❖ The ultimate mark of spiritual transformation is that we grow in love for our neighbor and our enemy (Romans 12:8-18, 21).
- ❖ When we weed out our passions (especially self-love) with the grace of God, we are no longer self-absorbed and self-indulgent and are able to love God and our neighbor.
- ❖ "At the beginning of our spiritual journey when we are spiritually immature, our entire religious attitude is ego- centered, emotional, and rational; but as we grow, and gain more control over our passions, our souls become purified and the Grace illumines our consciousness.
- ❖ We become more aware of God's presence, and more aware of the other. We move away from self-centeredness. The focus of our attention is on God. As this happens, our own personal 'I' expands and encompasses others, so that we cannot conceive of ourselves in isolation from God and our brethren. This is the bond of authentic spiritual love, empowered by Grace. The more we grow in this love, the more our love embraces all of those around us. We pray from the heart for them, and for the whole world. We are purified by Grace, so that we can authentically love in a purely unselfish way. This is the essence of what it means to be a Christian: to authentically love." Fr. Isaac.

### **5- Conclusion**

- ❖ Although it does not need to be as dramatic, a spiritual conversion needs to occur in the life of every Christian and must continue to occur throughout our lives till the day we die.

## **6- Activities / Discussion Points**

- ❖ Make a comparison between the life of St. Moses the Black before and after conversion to Christianity and how did he suffer in the beginning. It was not an easy process but he endured to the end and deserved to be called the strong St. Moses the Black.