

## Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, May 9th 2014

In our first reading today we hear perhaps the most miraculous (and certainly most imitated) story of conversion in all of human history. Paul – who is still Saul at this time – enters the story still “breathing murderous threats” against the new way of Jesus and exits it with scales falling from his eyes. It’s a complete turning around of a life that we witness today, one that requires much from Paul: openness, trust, courage, and enormous humility in admitting the prior misdirection of his life. It’s a beautiful story.

But it’s not the only beautiful thing happening in that reading. In fact, I think it’s not even the most beautiful. That’s a label I would give to the story of Ananias tucked snugly inside St. Paul’s.

I say this because it’s Ananias – who was himself going to be one of the targets of Saul’s murderous threats – who finds it possible to trust God, and not only to trust God but to forgive, and not only to forgive but to bless the very one at whose hands he would have otherwise suffered.

It must have been a shock for him to be asked by God to accept, forgive, bless one who was willing to use jail and torture to enforce religious unity. It was so much a shock that Ananias, obedient though he was willing to be, actually asked God whether he had it right, “are you sure it’s this man you want me to accept?” he asks. But despite a stammering beginning Ananias goes and accepts and forgives and blesses: “Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came,” he prays, “that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

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We are often seduced by the instantaneous nature of Paul’s conversion – or at least I am. I feel like if I were getting this Christian life right I wouldn’t, after so many years, still have to resist the temptations to breathe my own version of murderous threats. But I do. I still do.

Which is why I think our Christian life is a lot more like Ananias’ than Paul’s. It’s not very often that scales fall from our eyes and our whole lives are turned around. Much more often what this Christian life consists in is being willing to forgive, bless, accept those who have wounded us. Much more often our task is the task of Ananias, the daily task of one who has-been and is still-being converted to God.

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