

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Jan 23rd 2015

The story of Saul of Tarsus in the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is a dramatic event to be sure! Saul, on the way into the city of Damascus, has been commissioned by the Chief Priests to capture and imprison the disciples of Christ. He has been going about this task with vigor. But things were about to change drastically for Saul as he neared the city of Damascus.

Confronted by a blinding light from above and falling to the ground, Saul heard these words: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” He asks who’s asking and the reply comes back: “I am Jesus the Nazorean whom you are persecuting.” Saul is then instructed to continue his journey to Damascus where he will meet the disciples and learn from them. Saul does as he is instructed; he is subsequently baptized and receives the Holy Spirit. We know the rest of the story. Paul, the former Saul, the well-pedigreed Jewish student of the Law, becomes the vibrant Apostle to the Gentiles.

What is the significance of a story like this for you and me? The drama of the entrance to Damascus is all about conversion. In Saul/Paul’s case the conversion was immediate and historically decisive. He was baptized; he preached in the Synagogue at Damascus; he recognized and proclaimed vigorously that Jesus was the Son of God. What an incredible turnabout!

For most of us the conversion, the turnabout, is more gradual and much less dramatic. Conversion is a process and a process takes time and effort to be properly effected; it is not a once and for all situation.

Actually conversion is a lifetime project. A dramatic conversion story like Paul’s invites each of us to reflect on where we are along the line of that process, and how we might enhance or open ourselves to enhancement of that most important project of our lives. Ultimately our conversion has to do with relationship: the relationship with Jesus the Christ, the object of our Christian faith.

Lord, as we begin this New Year, we ask your blessing. Help us to realize the significance and importance of our ongoing conversion. Help us to respond like St Paul with great alacrity and generosity.

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