

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul, God told Ananias, was the “chosen vessel of Mine o bear My Name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.” But that Apostolic Office would not come without tribulation: “For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My Name’s sake.” The Apostolic Ministry is not one of the theology of glory. Those who confess Christ in this fallen world will be received no differently than Christ was.

Still breathing out murderous threats against the nascent Church, St. Paul was converted by a theophany of the Ascended Christ. He was stricken blind, and would write of difficulties with his eyes in his later Epistles. St. Paul was baptized, and he immediately began to preach Christ in the Synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

Converted miraculously, given the Apostolic Office, given to write 14 Books of the Bible, Paul knew that he did the very things that he was not to do. So of himself St. Paul would write “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.”

They are words of faith. They are not words that build up or ingratiate. They are not words of self-improvement or self-actualization. They are simply truth. So spoke St. Paul, whose miraculous conversion we remember this day. His confession of sinfulness is amazing to us because most men avoid the truth about themselves.

Paul had a Jewish pedigree of which to boast. By dress, by articulate speech, by degrees earned or by a high station in life,

fallen men weave a façade to appear differently than they really are. But self-deprecation is the same too. False humility inflames the flesh with pride equal to that which drives self-adoration. It is, as our Lord Himself describes it, whitewash on a tomb. It is an effort to present that which is dead and wreaking as something clean and desirable.

And precisely there do we meet what is completely unrealistic, yet true of all fallen flesh - the modern fig-leaf of self-actualization, the man made covering of pietism, men calling themselves what they are not - which only fools fallen men. It is a masquerade party for the dead of soul, a macabre face-painting to convince sinners that they are really not all that bad.

That we have all done the same is self-evident. God commands that we put the best construction on everything. But not on our own sin. There is no good construction to put on our own sin. It is simply idolatrous behavior pleasing only to the devil. It separates from God, and hurts those around you.

And trying to explain away your sins, attempting to play the pity-card with men and with God, expecting others to excuse your sin or expecting God to overlook you sin, is a deluded hallucination that can neither postpone nor deliver from death. Your sin has been real. It has been purposeful. And God has seen it.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” No frills, no self-aggrandizement, a simple, heart-felt confession of sinfulness from a fallen man with pressing need who stood before the eternal Cure for all sin. No delusion there. His earthly eyes blinded, still Paul saw clearly, with the

eyes of faith, the God Man. He saw Omnipotence draw nigh unto him.

But Paul made his confession of sinfulness unafraid to draw nigh unto Christ. By special, direct revelation he knew Him to be, as He is for you, a God of love, a God of grace. For the faith that gave birth to his confession finds its fount and source in Christ. His faith, and your faith, trusts in Him for the forgiveness of all your sins.

You too were converted miraculously. You were converted when Christ met you in your sinfulness, and overcame you in the font. The sinless Chief of Sinners that hung on the cross, the Incarnate God that forsook His heavenly home and took unto Himself a stone tomb for a roof, gave His life for you.

He shed His Blood that by that perfect, Once for All Sacrifice, you be declared righteous before God, forgiven, reconciled to your Maker, given Communion with God and with His Church.

And that righteousness comes to you as God calls you what you are not. When fallen men do so, it is simply deception. But when God calls you something, you become what He calls you. In Christ He declares you a saint. His Word is a strong Word, a creative Word, a Word that makes real what He proclaims, a Word that slays and gives life, a word that converts miraculously.

He declares you forgiven, and you are forgiven. He declares you righteous, and you are righteous in His sight. You are not like a whitewashed tomb - in Holy Baptism you are washed, and you are clean of soul. You are filled not with death, but

with life, as the Spirit of God is given to dwell in you. You are covered in the Blood of Christ.

The Conversion of St. Paul is an amazing recounting of the grace of God. Paul, sinner, persecutor of the Church, was converted, forgiven, and wrote more Books of the Bible than Moses or St. John. But the purpose of his Words are not that you know him. He wrote by the Spirit of God that you might come to know Christ.

And from Paul's sufferings you learn of the Christian life in this fallen world, and by faith you see through tribulation to that Day when the Lord comes at the last to lead His Church into Paradise.

Until that Day, you have the Words of St. Paul, who although not present in the Upper Room before the arrest of the Christ, nonetheless writes of the content of his miraculous theophany:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread..” By those Words, with that Bread, the Lord that appeared to Paul comes to you, that you may be forgiven and strengthened until the Day when you see Him face to face.

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.