

Monday January 25th, The Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Straight away, let us pray for the repose of the Soul of Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue who died this weekend. *Eternal rest give unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May he rest in peace. Amen. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

Gosh, didn't expect to wake up to a whiteout this morning! Be careful out there (as I will as I gingerly drive to the Crematorium this morning). Well it was a lovely weekend, and I appreciate that many people are quite rightly choosing to stay home at the moment, so it's great that more people are watching and praying along with the mass at home. We seem to have got the hang of live streaming, but we are always trying to improve. I've had a few requests for more modern hymns, but unfortunately I can only sing hymns that are out of copyright, which is why I'm going through the catalogue of 'golden oldies'. Continued thanks to Ian for his sterling efforts on the camera and uploading the mass.

And so today we celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. Paul, named Saul at his circumcision, a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, was born at Tarsus, the capitol of Cilicia. He was a Roman citizen. He was brought up as a strict Jew, and later became a violent persecutor of the Christians. While on his way to Damascus to make new arrests of Christians, he was suddenly converted by a miraculous apparition of Our Lord. About noon, a light from heaven suddenly blazed round him. Jesus with His glorified body appeared to him and addressed him, *'Why are you persecuting me?'* turning him away from his apparently successful career. An immediate transformation was wrought in the soul of St. Paul. He was suddenly converted to the Christian Faith. He was baptized, changed his name from Saul to Paul, and began travelling and preaching the Faith. From a fierce persecutor he became the great Apostle of the Gentiles. He made three missionary journeys which brought him to the great centres of Asia Minor and southern Europe, and made many converts. Fourteen of his Epistles are found in the New Testament. He was beheaded in Rome around 66 A.D., and his relics are in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls near the Ostian Way.

The first reading today, Acts of the Apostles 22:3-16, as you would expect, tells the great and well-known story of Saul's conversion. The Gospel, Mark 16:15-18 gives us one of the post-resurrection

appearances of Jesus, with him exhorting the now eleven Apostles to, 'Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation.' And how well Paul carried out that task.

*O God,
Who taught the whole world through the preaching of the Apostles Paul,
Draw us, we pray, nearer to you,
Through the example of him whose conversion we celebrate today,
And so make us witnesses to your truth in the world.
Stir up in us that fire of charity
With which the blessed Apostle Paul burned ardently
As he bore his concern for all the Churches.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

'Will You Come And Follow Me If I But Call Your Name?' Well, the Lord called Saul's name and he certainly followed, so let us make this our hymn today:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o469PRLdbHU>

Being one of the most famous and popular saints, as you'd expect St. Paul is Patron Saint of a great many things and places, including (wait for it): authors; evangelists; hailstorms; hospital public relations; journalists; lay people; missionary bishops; musicians; poisonous snakes; public relations personnel; public relations work; publishers; reporters; rope braiders; rope makers; saddlemakers; saddlers; tent makers; writers; Malta; Rome; Poznan, Poland; newspaper editorial staff; and the Diocese of Las Vegas, Nevada. He's a very busy Saint!

The Poet John Betjeman wrote a poem called 'The Conversion of St. Paul', or more accurately I think just 'The Conversion.' It was originally written as a reaction to a radio broadcast in 1955 by the humanist Margaret Knight called 'Morals without Religion' arguing that moral education and religious education could, and should, be separated. She believed there were two types of Christians: those who were deeply committed, and those who just go along with it to conform to society. Betjeman, who was a very committed Christian, but also suffered doubts at times, in his poem wishes that his conversion could have been as immediate and committed as St. Paul, but reminds us that it is different for us all, and concludes:

*What is Conversion? Turning round
To gaze upon a love profound.
For some of us see Jesus plain
And never once look back again,
And some of us have seen and known
And turned and gone away alone,
But most of us turn slow to see*

*The figure hanging on a tree
And stumble on and blindly grope
Upheld by intermittent hope.
God grant before we die we all
May see the light as did St Paul.*

The 'composer' (I use the word loosely) Mike Read (who used to be a Radio 1 DJ) set a number of Betjeman's poems to music (again, I use the word loosely) on an album called 'Words & Music' and it includes a rap version of 'Conversion.' Assault your ears if you wish. Don't say you weren't warned. The whirring sound you can hear is Betjeman spinning like a rotisserie in his grave...

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMAuwfOlfhI&list=OLAK5uy_IPav6NcxeHsb3RFPj95Puh23qWrxKZ5xw&index=28

I attach a picture I took of the ruins of the synagogue in Ephesus a few years ago: St. Paul actually preached here, so I was truly walking in the footsteps of a Saint.

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Kathleen Hopley whose funeral I will celebrate at Carleton this morning. *May she rest in the peace and love of Christ.*

Have a great start to the week.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.