

SAINT JOSEPH CHURCH + YORKVILLE

January 21, 2024

Newsletter no. 201

This coming Thursday, January 25th, the Church celebrates the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, which is the only feast on the Church's calendar that commemorates a conversion. There is no question that Paul's turn from being a scrupulous observer of the Jewish law and a persecutor of Christians to being a disciple of Christ was of immense historic importance. It was Paul who, of all the first-generation Christians, was most responsible for the early Church's rupture with Judaism and who, after Jesus himself, most defined what it meant to be a Christian. The actual event of Paul's conversion is famously described in Acts 9:1-19 and also in Acts 22:3-16, but the effects of his conversion can be read of in all his epistles, especially in the ones that he wrote to the Romans and to the Galatians.

What is conversion? Simply put, it is a coming to the realization that there should be a change in one's life, followed by acting upon that realization—in other words, a change of mind followed by a change of behavior. The Greek word for “conversion,” *metanoia* (literally “change of mind”), is found in many places in the New Testament and is such an important concept that we can't understand Christianity without it.

Conversions of some sort or other are part and parcel of the lives of the canonized saints and undoubtedly of the lives of most serious Christians. Some conversions are sudden and dramatic, like St. Paul's, and others are gradual and work themselves out, often undramatically, over the course of time. Even sudden conversions, however, need time to mature in terms of both thought and behavior.

If I were to be asked what was the most famous and influential conversion in Christian history after St. Paul's, I would say that it was that of St. Augustine (354-430), who describes its years-long outworking and its sudden denouement in his *Confessions*. In Western Christianity he has been the theologian most cited by both Catholics and Protestants; nearly everyone has at least heard of his *Confessions* and *The City of God*, which are just two of more than a hundred works of his that have survived the centuries and shaped Christian culture.

And what of his conversion? After having initially rejected orthodox Christianity, despite his mother Monica's deep commitment to it, and after having experimented with alternative forms of belief, Augustine gradually came to the realization that the Christian faith was the truth that he was searching for. The only thing that prevented him from being baptized was his inability to embrace the life of chastity that Christian morality demanded. It was while lamenting the gulf between his belief and his sexual longings that he heard a child's voice which he felt was telling him to open a book containing the epistles of St. Paul and read whatever he randomly opened up to and chanced to put his finger on. What he put his finger on was Romans 13:13-14: “Not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.” Augustine understood immediately that these words were addressed to him, and, as he writes, “I had no wish to read further, nor was there need. No sooner had I reached the end of the verse than the light of certainty flooded my heart and all dark shades of doubt fled away.”

St. Paul's conversion is the classic example of an abrupt change of mind and behavior. If anything had preceded it to smooth the way, the Scriptures do not tell us, and we can only speculate. But it seems to me that there must have been some openness to Christ on Paul's part that even he himself was unaware of. In the case of Augustine, however, it is obvious that he was haunted by Christianity all along and that his dramatic surrender to Christ was almost inevitable.

February 13th is Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. Every even-numbered year St. Joseph's gratefully recognizes its volunteers with a party on Shrove Tuesday at Maz Mezcal, the Mexican restaurant located at 316 East 86th Street and beloved of many parishioners; and that will be the case this year. If you have regularly served at St. Joseph's Church as a eucharistic minister, a lector, a member of the parish or finance councils, or if you have taken up the Sunday collection or counted the collection, or helped to put up and take down the Christmas and Easter decorations, or planned the weekly Family Mass, or volunteered in some other way at the church, you are invited to the Shrove Tuesday party at Maz Mezcal at 6:00 pm. But you must call the church beforehand (212-289-6030), no later than noon on Friday, February 9th, to RSVP. (Please don't call Maz Mezcal!) It will be a great evening!

Father Boniface

Mass intentions for the period from January 20th to 28th

Saturday-Sunday, January 20th-21st

4:00 pm: Ignaz Martin (D)
8:00 am: Marlon and Camille Amedee (L)
10:00 am: Kevin Kirby (D)
12:00 noon: Thomas Dooner (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Franciska and Ferencz Harangozo (D)
6:00 pm: St. Joseph's Parishioners

Monday, January 22nd

7:00 am: Ellen Houck (L)
12:15 pm: Frances Davis (D)

Tuesday, January 23rd

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Miriam Blanco (L)

Wednesday, January 24th

7:00 am: Kathleen Fitzmaurice (D)
12:15 pm: John Timlin (D)

Thursday, January 25th (The Conversion of Saint Paul)

7:00 am: Paul Liska (L), 90th Birthday
12:15 pm: Eddie Kolb (D)

Friday, January 26th

7:00 am:
12:15 pm: Eugene Piszkotowska (L), 103rd Birthday

Saturday, January 27th

8:00 am: Kathleen Privitera (D)
12:15 pm: Regina Camacho (L)
4:00 pm: John A. Martin (D)

Sunday, January 28th

8:00 am: St. Joseph's Parishioners
10:00 am: Johnny Clemente (D)
12:00 noon: Rose and Frank Christoforo (D)
2:00 pm (Hungarian): Istvan and Gizella Soltesz (D)
6:00 pm: Sinead Ochinero (L)