

The Conversion of Paul

Today the Church celebrates the conversion of St Paul, and each year this feast always marks the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Paul's conversion was one of the key moments in the development of the early Church. We heard his own testimony of this in our Bible reading just now (Galatians 1.11-16a).

Up to that point Paul, or Saul as he was known, was a fervent persecutor of the Christians. He saw this new sect as a threat to the Judaism in which he had been brought up and which he held so dear. However, his vivid experience on the Damascus road gave him a totally new perspective. His experience of the risen Christ literally overturned his life and he committed himself wholeheartedly to preaching and teaching the good news of Jesus Christ.

This shows that people can change, even those who hold very firm and apparently immutable views. Yes, even we can change. The effect on Paul was very much to broaden his horizons, to see the working of God in his world in a new and liberating way.

As a consequence of this experience Paul could only share his new faith, not only to his fellow Jewish people but also to the Gentiles. His missionary activity very much enabled the Church to grow both in numbers and in its understanding of the faith.

The values he taught, above all of mutual love and unity, are critical today not only in the Church but also in our world. Only by removing the blinkers of presuppositions and prejudice can peace be achieved in both the Church and the world. That is the message both for the work towards Christian unity and for the work of reconciliation.

And so we give thanks for the life and witness of St Paul. May we follow in his footsteps as we seek to live out our Christian faith in our world today.

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