

Overview:

The conversion of Paul was dramatic but that's not true for everyone. that is not how God works for all of us. Whether it is dramatic or nonexistent it is still the same Holy Spirit that God sends to each of us to guide and prompt us in every decision we make and to intercede for us in every moment of every day.

Lesson:

We are invited into an intimate relationship with God, our Father through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

In a sermon that Pastor Mark presented last month, he taught us about the conversion of Paul. From the very beginning, Paul believed that he was destined to stand proudly before God in full righteousness. He had been circumcised on the eighth day, was born "of the tribe of Benjamin," was a Pharisee, and a zealous defender of the Jewish church. He proudly claimed that "As to righteousness under the law, [he was] blameless."

That was Paul. Full of zeal. Full of passion. Full of Self.

But after his conversion, he viewed this resume in a different light. He writes: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish."

This was the conversion experience for Paul. The event itself was dramatic. It was also immediately life changing.

What about you? Can you point to a specific time in your life when you met Jesus on the road to Damascus? For some you can answer in the affirmative, but I would guess that for many of us we can't relate.

For me, I grew up in a strong religious family. We attended services every Sunday and even many weekdays, were all very active in the church, and our home life and even our decor reflected our devotion to God. Every time I read the story of Paul's conversion I would reflect on my own life and be a bit ashamed that I could not point to anything even remotely similar in my past. I had been quietly converted through Baptism when I was a baby and was nurtured in my relationship with

God ever since. It seems childish now but back then through young adulthood, I judged my favor with God based almost on this single fact alone. I related it to being like the “good child” in a family that the parents didn’t have to worry about and could then shift their focus to the “other” children that needed more attention. I always wondered if they got a bigger helping of the Holy Spirit than I did.

As I look back, what I find interesting about these thoughts are not the obviousness of how wrong I was about God’s love for me, but about how misunderstood I was about the Holy Spirit. I always saw him as the little angel that hung out with me and whispered into my heart reminding me about God. So, the fact that I already knew God meant that he didn’t have to work very hard.

But today’s passage corrects my misunderstanding. The Spirit of truth came into my life very quietly and very calmly through the waters of my baptism, but his work didn’t stop after my conversion. He formed a union with me that continues to this day. He doesn’t simply whisper in my ear with guidance and suggestion. Instead, he is an intimate translator between me and God.

Paul wrote about it this way:

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

Without the Holy Spirit we would turn from God and reject the grace and mercy that he offers through the work of Jesus Christ. We would find it foolish and would harden our hearts towards him. And most tragically we would sever our relationship with him and face eternal separation.

And so, when we receive Him through the sacrament of baptism, he takes residence in our hearts and connects us back into a relationship with God through the work of Jesus Christ. He then constantly intercedes on our behalf to ensure that this connection is never severed by convicting us in our sin and delivering God’s grace and forgiveness through the faith that he grows ever stronger in our hearts. This is the work of the Holy Spirit and it is a work that never ends.

And we respond by forming and nurturing our own relationships with others in the church and throughout the rest of the world. For the invisible church, we use our Spiritual gifts to lift up and support each other, to encourage, and to hold each other accountable for our actions. We come together to profess our failures and then worship in thanksgiving for the forgiveness of those sins through the sacrament of Communion.

And then we go out into the world and use these same Spiritual gifts to build relationships with the lost. We use our gifts of music, administration, teaching, and serving to bring the word of God to those who haven’t heard it or have rejected it and we intercede on their behalf that the Holy Spirit would convict their hearts and form in them a faith that turns them back toward God.

So, you see, the work of the HS is so much more than that little angel that keeps us on the right path. And he is so much more permanent than just being used for a dramatic transformation of our lives. He forms a union with us that is so intimate and powerful for no other reason than to keep us in constant relationship with God the Father and with Jesus, His son. It is through Him that God pours out his grace, mercy, and forgiveness to each one of us. This is what Jesus means when he says that "All that belongs to the Father is mine" in today's Gospel. Jesus has an incomprehensibly intimate, personal, loving relationship with God, the creator of everything. And he sends the HS to us so that we can have that, too.

Let's pray.

Holy Spirit,

Today we are reminded of you and the constant intercession that you provide between us and God. We understand that through you God pours out His grace and mercy and because of you we are adopted as His children. We ask that you continue to strengthen our faith and draw us into a more intimate relationship with our loving Father.

Holy Spirit, our sinful nature tempts us to look inwardly and place ourselves in the center of our lives but because of you we know that true, everlasting life is only possible when we look outwardly and place God in that center, and so we ask that you give us the desire to respond to His relationship and to use these gifts to serve those around us. Help us see the opportunities that we have each and every day to be the hands and feet of Jesus, our Lord. Give us the courage to act on these opportunities and to spread the Gospel to every person that we come in contact with by the words that we use, the actions that we take, and the life that we live.

And all of this we humbly ask in Jesus' name.

Amen.