

FAITH AND REASON

Jesus Changes Our Life from Within: Catechesis on apostolic zeal and the Apostle Paul:

The story of Paul of Tarsus is emblematic in this regard. In the first chapter of the Letter to the Galatians, as in the narration of the Acts of the Apostles, we can see that his zeal for the Gospel appears after his conversion and takes the place of his previous zeal for Judaism. He was a man who was zealous about the law of Moses for Judaism, and after his conversion, this zeal continued, but to proclaim, to preach Jesus Christ. Paul loved Jesus. Saul — Paul's first name — was already zealous, but Christ converts his zeal: from the Law to the Gospel. His zeal first wanted to destroy the Church, whereas after, it builds it up. We might ask ourselves: what happened, that passed from destruction to construction? What changed in Paul? In what way was his zeal, his enthusiasm for the glory of God, transformed?

Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that passion, from the moral point of view, is neither good nor evil: its virtuous use makes it morally good, sin makes it bad (Quaestio "De veritate" 24, 7). In Paul's case, what changed him is not a simple idea or a conviction: it was the encounter with the risen Lord. Do not forget this: it is the encounter with the Lord that changes a life. It was Saul's encounter with the risen Lord that transformed his entire being. Paul's humanity, his passion for God and his glory was not annihilated, but transformed, "converted" by the Holy Spirit. The only one who can change our hearts is the Holy Spirit. And it was so for every aspect of his life. Just as occurs in the Eucharist: the bread and wine do not disappear but become the Body and Blood of Christ. Paul's zeal remains, but it becomes the zeal of Christ. It changes direction, but the zeal is the same. The Lord is served with our humanity, with our prerogatives and our characteristics, but what changes everything is not an idea, but rather life itself, as Paul himself says: "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). The encounter with Jesus Christ changes you from within, it makes you another person. If one is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, this is the meaning of being a new creation. To become Christian is not to apply make-up that changes your face, no! If you are Christian, your heart changes, but if you are Christian in appearance, this will not do ... made-up Christians will not do. True change is of the heart. And this happened to Paul. Passion for the Gospel is not a matter of comprehension or studies, which are helpful, but which do not inspire it. Rather, it means going through the same experience of "fall and resurrection" that Saul/Paul lived, and which is at the origin of the transfiguration of his apostolic zeal. You can study all the theology you want; you can study the Bible and all that, and become atheist or worldly, it is not a question of studies; in history there have been many atheist theologians! Studies are useful but they do not generate the new life of grace. Indeed, as Saint Ignatius of Loyola says: "For it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies" (Spiritual Exercises, Annotations, 2, 4). It is about things that change you within, that let you know something else, savor something else. May each of us reflect: "Am I a religious person?" "Fine" "Do I pray?" "Yes" "Do I try to obey the commandments?" "Yes" "But where is Jesus in your life?" "Ah, no, I do the things the Church commands". But where is Jesus? Have you encountered Jesus, have you spoken with Jesus? Do you pick up the Gospel or talk with Jesus, do you remember who Jesus is? And this is something that we very often lack. When Jesus enters your life, like he entered Paul's life, Jesus enters and changes everything. Many times, we have heard comments about people: "But look at him, he was a wretch and now he is a good man, she is a good woman... who changed them?". Jesus, they found Jesus. Has your Christian life changed? "No, more or less, yes...". If Jesus did not enter your life, it did not change. "You can be Christian only on the outside". No, Jesus has to enter, and this changes you, and this is what happened to Paul. We have to find Jesus, and this is why Paul said that Christ's love drives us, it is what takes you forward. The same change happened to all the saints, who went forward when they found Jesus.

We can reflect further on the change that takes place in Paul, who from a persecutor became an apostle of Christ. We note that there is a sort of paradox in him: indeed, as long as he feels he is righteous before God, he feels authorized to persecute, to arrest, even to kill, as in the case of Stephen; but when, enlightened by the Risen Lord, he discovers he was a "blasphemer and persecutor" this is what he says of himself, "I formerly blasphemed and persecuted" — then he starts to be truly capable of loving. And this is the way. If one of us says, "Ah, thank you Lord, because I am a good person, I do good things, I do not commit major sins...", this is not a good path, this is the path of self-sufficiency, it is a path that does not justify you, it makes you an elegant Catholic, but an elegant Catholic is not a holy Catholic, he is elegant. The true Catholic, the true Christian, is one who receives Jesus within, that changes your heart. This is the question I ask you all today: what does Jesus mean for me? Have I let him enter my heart, or do I keep him within reach but so that he does not really enter within? Have I let myself be changed by him? Or is Jesus just an idea, a theology that goes ahead... And this is zeal: when one finds Jesus and feels the fire, like Paul, they must preach Jesus, they must talk about Jesus, they must help people, they must do good things. When one finds the idea of Jesus, he or she remains an ideologue of Christianity, and this does not save, only Jesus saves us, if you have encountered him and opened the door to your heart to him. The idea of Jesus does not save you! May the Lord help us find Jesus, encounter Jesus, and may this Jesus change our life from within and help us to help others... **Author:**

Pope Francis

Prayer for Independence Day (July 4): God, source of all freedom, this day is bright with the memory of those who declared that life and liberty are your gift to every human being. Help us to continue a good work begun long ago. Make our vision clear and our will strong: that only in human solidarity will we have liberty, and justice only in the honor that belongs to every life on earth. Turn our hearts toward the family of nations: to understand the ways of others, to offer friendship, and to find safety only in the common good of all. We ask this through Christ our Lord... **Amen.**

For the Spirit of Mary: My powerful Queen, you are all mine through your mercy, and I am all yours. Take away from me all that may displease God and cultivate in me all that is pleasing to Him. May the light of your faith dispel the darkness of my mind, your deep humility takes the place of my pride, your continual sight of God fill my memory with His presence. May the fire of the love of your heart inflame the lukewarmness of my own heart. May your virtues take the place of my sins. May your merits be my enrichment and make up for all that is wanting in me before God. My beloved Mother, grant that I may have no spirit but your spirit, to know Jesus Christ and his Divine will and to praise and glorify the Lord, that I may love God with burning love like yours. **St. Louis De Montfort**

A Thought For the Day

Sunday The very moment God sees us fully convinced of our nothingness, He reaches out His hand to us.

Monday Lord, I dare not say I love Thee, but I will love Thee.

Tuesday Close your ears to the whisperings of hell and bravely oppose its onslaughts.

Wednesday The proper effect of the Eucharist is the transformation of man into God.

Thursday Leave sadness to those in the world. We who work for God should be lighthearted.

Friday Suffering is a short pain and a long joy.

Saturday There is no such thing as bad weather. All weather is good because it is God's.

Let us beware of complaints, resentments, and evil-speaking against those who are ill-disposed to us, discontented with us, or hostile to our plans and arrangements, or who even persecute us with injuries, insults, and calumnies. Rather let us go on treating them as cordially as at first, or more so, as far as possible showing them esteem, always speaking well of them, doing them good, serving them on occasion, even to the point of taking shame and disgrace upon ourselves, if necessary to save their honor. All this ought to be done, first, to overcome evil with good, according to the teaching of the Apostles; and secondly, because they are our allies rather than our adversaries, as they aid us to destroy self-love, which is our greatest foe; and since it is they who give us an opportunity to gain merit, they ought to be considered our dearest friends... **St. Vincent de Paul**

God is not, like creatures, made up of parts. God is spirit, without bodily dimensions. Firstly, nobody can cause change without itself being changed. Secondly, things with dimensions are potential of division. But the starting point for all existence must be wholly real and not potential in any way: though things that get realized begin as potential, preceding them is the source of their realization which must already be real. Thirdly, living bodies are superior to other bodies; and what makes a body living is not the dimensions which make it a body (for then everything with dimensions would be living), but something more excellent like a soul. The most excellent existence of all then cannot be a body. So, when the scriptures ascribe dimensions to God they are using spatial extension to symbolize the extent of God's power; just as they ascribe bodily organs to God as metaphors for their functions, and postures like sitting or standing to symbolize authority or strength... **Thomas Aquinas**

I earnestly admonish you, therefore, my brothers, to look after your spiritual well-being with judicious concern. Death is certain; life is short and vanishes like smoke. Fix your minds, then, on the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Inflamed with love for us, he came down from heaven to redeem us. For our sake he endured every torment of body and soul and shrank from no bodily pain. He himself gave us an example of perfect patience and love. We, then, are to be patient in adversity.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... Romans 15:5-6

In His Will is Our Peace

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