

28// OF THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL AND OF THE NAME OF CONVERSION

Conversion is said of *converter*, “I am turned”, or is as much as together turned from sins and evils. He is not converted that shriveth him to the priest of one sin and hideth another. It is said conversion, for St. Paul this day was converted to the faith leaving his vices. Why he is said Paul, it shall be said afterward.

The conversion of St. Paul was made the same year that Christ suffered his passion, and St. Stephen was stoned also, not in the year natural, but appearing. For our Lord suffered death the eighth calends of April, and St. Stephen suffered death the same year, the third day of August and was stoned. And St. Paul was converted the eighth calends of February.

And three reasons been assigned wherefore the conversion of St. Paul is hallowed more than of other saints. First for the ensample, because that no sinner, whatsover he be, should despair of pardon when he seeth him that was in so great sin to be in so great joy. Secondly for the joy, for like as the church had great sorrow in this persecution, so had she great joy in his conversion. Thirdly, for the miracle that our Lord showed when of one so cruel a persecutor was made so true a preacher.

The conversion of him was marvellous by reason of him that made him, and of him that ordained him, and of the patient that suffered it.

MARVELLOUS BY REASON OF HIM THAT MADE HIM TO BE CONVERTED

By reason of him that made him to be converted, that was Jesu Christ, which showed there his marvellous puissance in that he said: “It is hard for thee to strive against the alle [small knife or awl] or pricks.” And in that he changed him so suddenly, for anon as he was changed he said, “Lord what wilt thou that I do?” Upon this word saith St. Austin: The lambs slain of the wolves have made of a wolf a lamb, for he was ready for to obey, that tofore was wood for to persecute.

Secondly, he showed his marvellous wisdom. His marvellous wisdom was in that he took from him the swelling of pride in offering to him the inward things of humility and not the height of majesty. For he said “I am Jesus of Nazareth,” and he called not himself God ne the son of God, but he said to him, take thine infirmities of humanity and cast away the squames of pride.

Thirdly, he showed his pitiful debonairty and mercy, which is signified in that that he that was in deed and in will to persecute, he converted, how be it he had evil will, as he that desired all the menaces and threatenings, and had evil purpose; as he that went to the prince of priests; as he that had a joy in his evil works that he led the Christian men bound to Jerusalem. And therefore his journey and voyage was right evil, and yet nevertheless by the mercy of God was he converted.

MARVELLOUS OF HIM THAT ORDAINED IT

Secondly the conversion was marvellous of him that ordained it, that is of the light that he ordained in his conversion. And it is said that this light was dispositive, sudden, and celestial, and this light of heaven advironed [surrounded] him suddenly.

Paul had in him these vices. The first was hardiness [boldness], which is noted when it is said that he went to the prince of the priests, and as the gloss saith, not called, but by his own will and envy that enticed him. The second was pride, and that is signified by that he desired and sighed the menaces and threatenings. The third was the intent carnal, and the understanding that he had in the law, whereof the gloss saith upon that word: I am Jesus, etc. I God of heaven speak, the which thou supposest to be dead by the consent of the Jews.

And this light divine was sudden, it was great, and out of measure, for to throw down him that was high and proud, into the ditch or pit of humanity; it was celestial, because it turned and changed his fleshly understanding into celestial, or it may be said that this ordinance or disposition was in three things; that is to wit in the voice crying, in the light shining, and in the virtue of puissance.

MARVELLOUS BY THE VIRTUE OF THE SUFFERING OF THE PATIENT

Thirdly, it was marvellous by the virtue of the suffering of the patient, that is of Paul in whom the conversion was made. For these three things were made in him withoutforth marvellously, that it is to wit, that he was beaten to the earth, he was blind and fasted three days, and was smitten down to the ground for to be raised. And St. Austin saith that he was smitten down for to be blind, for to be changed, and for to be sent; he was sent to suffer death for truth. And yet saith St. Austin, he that was out of the faith was hurt for to be made believe, the persecutor was hurt for to be made a preacher, the son of perdition was hurt for to be made the vessel of election, and was made blind for to be illumined, and this was as touching his dark understanding.

Then in the three days that he abode thus blind, he was learned and informed in the gospel, for he learned it never of man ne by man, as he himself witnesseth, but by the revelation of Jesu Christ. And St. Austin saith thus: I say that St. Paul was the very champion of Jesu Christ, taught of him, redressed of him, crucified with him, and glorious in him. He was made lean in his flesh that his flesh should be disposed to the effect of good operation, and from forthon his body was established and disposed to all good.

He could well suffer hunger and abundance, and was informed and instructed in all things, and all adversities he gladly suffered. Chrysostom saith: He overcame tormentors, tyrants, and people full of woodness [madness], like as flies; and the death, the torments and all the pains that might be done to him, he counted them but as the play of children. All them he embraced with a good will, and he was ennobled in himself to be bound in a strong chain more than to be crowned with a crown, and received more gladly strokes and wounds than other gifts.

And it is read that in him were three things against the three that were in our foremost father Adam, for Adam erected and addressed him against God our Lord. and in St. Paul was contrary for he was thrown down to the earth. In Adam was the opening of his eyes, and Paul was on the contrary made blind, and Adam ate of the fruit defended, and St. Paul contrary was abstinent of convenable meat [food].

The [iconography of St. Paul](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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