

January 25, 2024



Daily Reflections

WITH EYES WIDE OPEN

By Julie Mussché

From Today's First Reading

Paul addressed the people in these words:

*"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia,
but brought up in this city.*

*At the feet of Gamaliel I was educated strictly in our ancestral law
and was zealous for God, just as all of you are today.*

*I persecuted this Way to death,
binding both men and women and delivering them to prison...*

*"A certain Ananias, a devout observer of the law,
and highly spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,
came to me and stood there and said,*

*'Saul, my brother, regain your sight.'
And at that very moment I regained my sight and saw him.
Then he said,*

*'The God of our ancestors designated you to know his will,
to see the Righteous One, and to hear the sound of his voice;*

*for you will be his witness before all
to what you have seen and heard.*

Now, why delay?

*Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away,
calling upon his name."*

ACTS 22:2-4; 12-16

*Saul, still breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord,
went to the high priest and asked him
for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, that,
if he should find any men or women who belonged to the Way,
he might bring them back to Jerusalem in chains.*

*On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus,
a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him.*

*He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,
"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

He said, "Who are you, sir?"

The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do."

ACTS 9:1-6

Reflection

Today's first Reading and the alternate, both from Acts, tell the story of Paul's Conversion, which we celebrate today. We discover through the narrative that Paul was a student of Gamliel, a staunch defender of Jewish Law, and was in hot pursuit to arrest the followers of the Way in Damascus. Who was Gamliel? A member of the Sanhedrin and a well regarded teacher of Jewish Law. One quote from him: "By three things is the world sustained: by judgment, by truth and by peace." (*Pirkei Avot 1:18*)

Not particularly consistent with Paul's "breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord," albeit Paul's anger appears to have gotten the better of him. Paul, overtaken by rage, is on a mission believing he is doing God's work, when he is knocked off his high horse and blinded. This striking example of an entry point of conversion captures the unexpected and ineffable nature of Grace.

A brief segue: I first heard the word conversion when I was about three or four. Both my mother and aunt had converted to Catholicism, a reality my Lutheran Grandmother received with great angst. My mom had converted in nursing school and my aunt when she was fourteen. The idea of conversion was a much

discussed topic in the household and related to my spiritual rearing.

So, what is the meaning of conversion? Both the scripture passages and the personal tale are examples. *Vocabulary.com* offers several **definitions**: an event that results in a transformation, a change of religion, or a spiritual enlightenment causing a person to lead a new life. I suppose that all of these seem to capture what happened in both cases.

In the example of Paul, he was set in his beliefs, experienced a wake-up call, and literally was able to see things differently. His relationship with God, and community, shifted radically. The change was seismic, creating a liminal space and the need for loving care to provide the efficacy for Paul to move from one point to another. Like most of us, the internal dissonance that Paul may have experienced -- consider that he took part in St. Stephen's martyrdom -- must have required enormous faith and trust in God's great love to reach a balance between belief and action, contrition and mercy, all in the undertaking of conversion.

Conversion: an integrated movement of heart and soul touched by Grace, where nothing will ever be the same, where lives are changed forever, what a great mystery. Conversions can be great, they can be small, they open our eyes to see anew. Amazing Grace!



For Pondering

Consider a time where you experienced a conversion of heart and soul:

- What shifted for you?
 - How did this movement change your life?
 - What is your thanksgiving?
-

For Prayer

An invitation to find a version of the hymn Amazing Grace and to rest in the music and lyrics.

If you enjoy reading our reflections and would like to make a donation towards this ministry, click the button below!

Support CSD



Center for
Spiritual
Development

COMPANIONS ON THE
SACRED JOURNEY



Visit Website

714-744-3172

Join Mailing
List



To “Unsubscribe” from the daily reflections while remaining on our general mailing list, please [email us](#). The unsubscribe function below will unsubscribe you from all emails from CSD. Please know we will never share your information.

Center for Spiritual Development | 434 A South Batavia Street, Orange, CA 92868 714-744-3175

[Unsubscribe slongbotham@csjorange.org](mailto:slongbotham@csjorange.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by thecsd@csjorange.org