

LOCKED DOWN IN JANUARY WITH ST. PAUL

On January 25th we have the feast of the Conversion of Paul (then named Saul). It is recorded in "Acts of Apostles" (chapter 9: verses 1-19), as follows:-

(Meanwhile) Saul was still breathing threats to slaughter the Lord's disciples. He had gone to the high priest and asked for letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, that would authorise him to arrest and take to Jerusalem any followers of the Way, men or women, that he could find.

Suddenly, while he was travelling to Damascus and just before he reached the city, there came a light from heaven all round him. He fell to the ground, and then he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you, Lord?" he asked, and the voice answered, "I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me. Get up now and go into the city, and you will be told what you have to do."

The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless, for though they heard the voice, they could see no-one. Saul got up from the ground, but even with his eyes wide open, he could see nothing at all, and they had to lead him into Damascus by the hand. For three days, he was without his sight, and took neither food nor drink.

A disciple called Ananias who lived in Damascus had a vision in which he heard the Lord say to him, "Ananias!" When he replied, "Here I am, Lord," the Lord said, "You must go to Straight Street and ask at the house of Judas for someone called Saul, who comes from Tarsus. At this moment he is praying, having had a vision of a man called Ananias coming in and laying hands on him to give him back his sight."

When he heard that, Ananias said, "Lord, several people have told me about this man and all the harm he has been doing to your saints in Jerusalem. He has only come here because he holds a warrant from the chief priests to arrest everybody who invokes your name."

The Lord replied, "You must go all the same, because this man is my chosen instrument to bring my name before pagans and pagan kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he himself must suffer for my name."

Then Ananias went. He entered the house, and at once laid his hands on Saul and said,

"Brother Saul, I have been sent by the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on your way here so that you may recover your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Immediately it was as though scales fell away from Saul's eyes and he could see again.

So he was baptised there and then, and after taking some food he regained his strength.

In at least two of his New Testament letters, Paul (previously Saul) refers to his trials and hardships, which were promised him by Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 4⁷⁻¹⁵, we hear him say:

"We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.

We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered; we see no answer to our problems, but never despair; we have been persecuted but never deserted, knocked down, but never killed; always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body.

Indeed, while we are still alive, we are consigned to our death every day, for the sake of Jesus, so that in our mortal flesh the life of Jesus, too, may be openly shown. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

But as we have the same spirit of faith that is mentioned in Scripture - I BELIEVED, AND THEREFORE I SPOKE - we too believe and therefore we too speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus to life will raise us with Jesus in our turn, and put us by his side and you with us. You see, all this is for your benefit, so that the more grace is multiplied among people, the more thanksgiving there will be, to the glory of God."

In Philippians 4¹²⁺¹³ we hear him say further:
 "... I have been through my initiation and now I am ready for anything anywhere, full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty. There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength."

With the feast of Paul's conversion firmly in our minds and hearts - 25th January - may we be consoled this month by his following words:

Romans 8 35-39: "Nothing... can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked.

As scripture promised, for your sake we are being massacred daily, and reckoned as sheep for the slaughter.

These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Ephesians 3¹⁴⁻²¹Paul's Prayer

"This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of His infinite glory, may He give you the power through His Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and, then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to Him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

Glory be to Him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 6¹⁰⁻¹³

"Finally, grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of His power.

Put God's armour on, so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics.

For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle, but against the sovereignties and the Powers who originate the darkness in this world, the spiritual army of evil in the heavens.

That is why you must rely on God's armour, or you will not be able to put up any resistance when the worst happens, or have enough resources to hold your ground."

(ALL OF THESE 6 PAGES HAVE BEEN HANDWRITTEN BY FATHER CON ON JANUARY 6TH/7TH 2021, AS THE PARISH OFFICE COMPUTER IS AWAY AGAIN FOR "REPAIR". HE HOPES AND PRAYS THAT YOU WILL BE INSPIRED AND CONSOLED BY ST. PAUL'S WORDS IN JANUARY LOCKDOWN).

AMEN.