

Readings: *Acts 22:3 – 16 or 9:1 – 20; Psalm 116 (117); Mark 16:15 – 18 or Matthew 19: 27 – 30.*

There can be little doubt that Luke (the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*) thought that the Conversion of Saul the Pharisee into Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, was a central event in the early life of the Church. He gives us three accounts of this event: the two mentioned above, and a third in Paul's defence before King Agrippa in chapter 26.

These accounts differ in detail but agree in the main facts: Saul was a convinced and authorised persecutor of the Church; on a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus he was struck blind; a voice, claiming to be *Jesus whom you are persecuting*, identified itself in this way with the suffering members of the Church; Saul was commissioned (either by Jesus himself or through Ananias) to be a witness to the non-Jewish world; after receiving his sight he was baptized to *be filled with the Holy Spirit*; he was shown that he *must suffer for the name* of Jesus; his preaching was to include a promise of the forgiveness of sins.

In these details we can see much that links with the beliefs and teaching of Paul in his letters.

These include: -

Paul's conviction that the Gospel was meant for all – not only for the Jewish people (see *Romans 3: 29 & 30, 9: 24 f., 15: 7 – 12*).

His teaching about the Church as the Body of Christ, of which each Christian is a member (a word much diluted in everyday speech, but which for Paul meant a limb or organ, such as an eye or a foot; see *1 Corinthians 12*):

The belief that a Christian must expect to suffer, and should see that suffering as a sharing in the suffering of Christ (see *Colossians 1: 24*).

The gift of the Holy Spirit to all Christians (see *Romans 5: 5 and chapter 8*).

God's forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus (*1 Corinthians 15: 3; Colossians 2: 11 – 14*).

These teachings – along with the life and death of Saint Paul – are things for which we may well give thanks on this Feast of his Conversion.

May we follow his advice: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ* (1 Corinthians 11:1).