

1.25.2026 The Conversion of St. Paul (Acts 9:1; Matthew 19:27)

The Gospel authors record several instances in which Jesus healed people who were blind, and in every case it was not only physical sight that was restored, but spiritual sight - the grace of God that opens the eyes of our heart to the end that we may see Jesus, not as a good man or great moral teacher, but as the Lord of our life and the Savior of the world.

In one such account, St. John tells us that Jesus healed a man who was born blind by making mud, anointing the man's eyes, and telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The text tells us that the man "*went and washed and came back seeing*" (John 9:7). Upon his return, as you can imagine this man who everyone knew only as a blind beggar caused quite a commotion. The neighbors that knew him and those who'd seen him before couldn't believe this was the same man, but after he repeatedly insisted he was the man they knew, and that he'd been miraculously healed by our Lord, they called the Pharisees, who asked him again, how he'd received his sight. After he told them the same story, they further confirmed his identity by talking with his parents, and then, as they continued to question him, the man confessed Christ, saying, "*Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing*" (John 9:32-33), and when the Pharisees heard this they cast him out of the synagogue, excommunicating him from religious and social life.

The man in this Gospel account was blind from birth, and just a moment before our Lord healed him, the disciples asked, "Why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or those of his parents?" Jesus answered, "*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him*" (John 9:2-3). This man's blindness was for the glory of God, to manifest His works, and we recognize that truth on display in his miraculous healing and public confession of Christ. The man was healed in such a miraculous way that the wonderful works of God - His mighty power, His active presence in this world, and His loving purpose for all people were displayed in what we would consider a most unlikely circumstance and a most unlikely person - in a man who was born blind.

God's good plan for us all is seen in a blind man as he gains physical and spiritual sight, and immediately begins to point others to God, and the irony in all of this is rich, because the Pharisees, the religious leaders who cast him out of the synagogue, the men whose role was to guide the people to God, remained spiritually blind. They were, as Jesus called them, "*blind guides*" (Matthew 15:14) who couldn't even find their own way to God because their pride and selfish desire for power continued to block their sight of Him.

The Pharisees could see Jesus, the Rabbi and itinerant preacher standing in front of them, but they were completely blind to the greater truth that He was the Promised Messiah, their Redeemer, and this morning we celebrate the conversion of one of their own, another spiritually blind Pharisee, who on the road to Damascus was struck physically blind to the end that God may once again display His wonderful work in a most unlikely person.

Before his conversion, St. Paul, who is also called by his Hebrew name, Saul, was a blind guide. He was blind when he acted as an approving witness in the stoning death of the first Christian martyr, St. Stephen (Acts 8:1). He was blind as he breathed out "*murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord*" (Acts 9:1) who he viewed to be as much of a dangerous menace as the Christ they followed. He was blind, a blind guide walking entirely in the wrong direction when "*suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him,*" and he fell to the ground and heard Jesus say, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (Acts 9:3-4).

St. Paul was, in a spiritual sense, a blind guide, but by the grace of God on the Damascus road, he was struck physically blind, and this blindness came upon him, like the man born blind, to the end that he might be healed entirely, both body and soul, and being healed, "*that the works of God might be displayed in him,*" and we can't help but recognize the wonderful works of God - His mighty power, His active presence in this world, and His loving purpose for all people on full display in St. Paul as we celebrate this feast marking his conversion and reflect on 2,000 years of good fruit, that by the grace of God, has sprung from his life and ministry.

The passage we read this morning described Paul, a blind guide, who after encountering Jesus soon realized just how blind he really was, as this

so-called guide had to be *“led by the hand”* to Damascus. After three days, in which he neither ate nor drank, but just remained in darkness, a disciple of our Lord named Ananias came to Paul, and said to him, *“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, He is the Son of God. And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ”* (Acts 9:17-22).

The wonderful works of God are displayed in the most unlikely people. This morning we recognize that truth first in a man born blind, who after a personal, healing encounter with our Lord amazed those who knew him by confessing Jesus as Christ and standing boldly against the Pharisees, quickly making the case that he was the one who could truly see, while they remained blind. We also recognize the wonderful works of God displayed in St. Paul, another Pharisee who was once a blind guide that had set out to destroy the Church, but by the grace and mercy of Almighty God hands were laid upon him, scales fell from his eyes, he rose, was baptized, and became, as Jesus described him, *“my chosen instrument to proclaim My name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel”* (Acts 9:15).

The man who had so blindly set out to destroy the Church became an Apostle who would build it, and this morning, as we celebrate the day St. Paul was given eyes to see, consider the thought that while his experience is unique in so many ways, it's also much like our own conversion in the sense that by God's grace our blindness is healed - we are given eyes to see not only the things of this world, but those of the world to come. This thought once again brings to mind the man born blind, and the fact that when he was repeatedly questioned by the Pharisees, every answer he gave boiled down to this statement he so boldly proclaimed: *“One thing I know, I was blind but now I see!”* (John 9:25). God miraculously heals the blindness of the most unlikely

people, even people like you and I, so that His wonderful works might be displayed in them, and us.

Consider the example of these saints as evidence of that truth. We've talked about the man born blind who was anointed by Jesus, healed, and boldly confessed Christ as the Messiah, and Saul, a blind guide and an approving witness to an unjust execution, he was given eyes to see and became our Lord's chosen instrument to proclaim His name. Consider Matthew, a sinful tax collector, who was called by name and inspired to write a Gospel of our Lord, or Mary Magdalene, who was possessed by seven demons. Jesus drove them from her, and she became the first to see the Risen Christ. St. Mary of Egypt, she lived a life driven by lust until through her conversion she became a holy example of humble repentance. The great St. Augustine also lived such a life until the prayers of his mother, St. Monica, were answered leading him to become one of Christianity's greatest theologians. C.S. Lewis was a disgruntled atheist who became the greatest defender of Mere Christianity, and the words of John Newton, who was once a lost, foul-mouthed captain of a slave ship describe them all and echo those of a man born blind, who boldly proclaimed, "*One thing I know, I was blind but now I see!*"

In the countless examples of the saints who've gone before us we recognize the truth that the conversion of St. Paul is much like the conversion of every saint. We're a people walking in darkness until the day we're struck blind by the light of God's glory, miraculously healed through the sacrificial love of His Son, and given eyes to see the things of heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit, all to the end that the wonderful works of God might be displayed in us - His power, His presence, His loving purpose for all people. As we celebrate the conversion of St. Paul, may we celebrate our own conversion, and by the grace of God may we always be given eyes to see Jesus so that we will never overlook the world He died to save.