

**Proclamation and Service**      **Conversion of St. Paul**      Monday, January 25, 2016  
8:15 AM    **Acts 22:3-16; Mk 16:15-18**    (The work of Christ continues in the body of Christ, in the believers in the world.)

**“I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’”**

St. Paul is noted for his elaborate image of the body of Christ. Where does it come from? It really comes from his experience in this moment of his so-called conversion, when he hears the voice, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”—**Jesus identifying with those who are persecuted.** This is really **the origin of the idea of the body of Christ.** Not only is Christ raised from the dead, but **he has merged into his believers and experiences what they experience.**

This leads to another point that is made in Colossians: **“I make up in my sufferings what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ.”** Now that perplexes people. How could there be anything lacking in the suffering of Christ? Well, in one way **Christ of course completed his work, but not the work. The work of Christ continues in the body of Christ, in the believers in the world.** So what believers experience, Jesus experiences. This is a unity, a unity of experience itself.

It blends very easily into the gospel teaching in St. Matthew: **“Whatever you do for the least or to the least, you do for or to me.”** A very similar idea: **God in Christ continues to experience human life through those who cling to him in faith,** who constitute therefore a new creation, a new reality. **So the work of the apostle is not only to preach the gospel to those outside of the good news and bring them into the good news; it is also to care for the members of the body,** and not only to care for but to be with: **this idea of communion:** many parts, one body, communion, unity, oneness of being, and to think about this and **to let it**

**actually influence the way we live.** It is a profound and very creative idea. And it comes from God himself through this experience of St. Paul.

And notice, even after this extraordinary mystical experience of unity with God in Christ, Ananias tells Paul but **you still have to be baptized, so that all your sins can be forgiven.**

Now in a sense, one of the problems of modern thinking is, modern thinking sees correctly that **God is not bound by the sacramental system.** That is true. That has always been true. It's always been said too. However, then we tend to act as if the sacramental system is somehow optional. Well, that's not true. God is not bound by it, **but we are.** And **we need to use the sacraments as God designates them** for the purposes that God has provided them for, and not just simply imagine that, well, everything will be perfectly fine whether or not people hear the gospel. Well, God will talk to them. Well, yes, **we do believe God will lead all people into his presence and give them the option and the opportunity to receive his grace and mercy.** But the ordinary means of our expressing this faith is through the sacraments, especially Baptism.

**So we are called to continue to preach the good news and baptize in Jesus' name, which is exactly the point in the Gospel of Mark.** And of course Baptism is something that can either be accepted or rejected. Here Jesus says, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”** That is a promise. **“Whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** Not believing does not mean not accepting the principles or the propositions of the catechism. **It means not trusting in God,** not wanting a relationship with God, or even wanting to be God. **So the work of the Church continues, both service to the body and proclamation of the good news.** And in the name of God, in the name of Christ we need to continue this.