

Refashioning St. Paul Third Week of Easter Friday, April 15, 2016 8:15 AM
Acts 9:1-20; Jn 6:52-59 (There's need for a new way of looking at life, at God, at everything, at oneself.)

“For three days he was unable to see and he neither ate nor drank.”

This is a story of the conversion of St. Paul. The word “conversion” is the Greek metanoia that was essential to Jesus’ own proclamation. He began with that. There is need for metanoia; there is need for conversion. **There’s need for a new way of looking at life, at God, at everything, at oneself.** Jesus commented in his ministry that no one can pour new wine into old skins. This is another aspect of conversion. We don’t grow up in a culture with a language and simply have ready-made categories that will explain to us the meaning of life or the meaning of the gospel. The gospel when it’s addressed to the categories of any culture will simply drain out, like new wine in old skins. **The categories of mere human culture cannot hold the meaning that comes from the mind of God.** Again, Jesus says, “No one sews onto an old cloak a new patch.” But that is what many people do with the gospel. They try to just patch the life they have grown up with, but we can see that’s not enough. **We need conversion, a new life, metanoia, a new way of looking.**

So here **St. Paul**, who was all along devoted to God as he understood God, but in fact persecuting Christ, now comes to actually a death, **the death of his old self**, the death of Saul. He is gone now. Why? Because he needs new skins; he needs a new garment; he needs a new self; he needs a new identity. **He has to understand himself in a wholly new way. And who can teach him but God himself?** Ananias is skeptical: but, Lord, I know this man. He is terrible. He is an enemy. He is persecuting your people. Yes, but I have plans. Only God can really bring about that new life, that conversion. **But it takes death, and in this case it’s a**

death of three days of blindness. As Jesus was in the earth three days, Saul is without light for three days—necessary.

We don't come to new life and we don't come to the light without experiencing death and darkness. But **a lot of Christians** just don't want any death or darkness. They **just want to hold onto that old cloak, put a patch here, a patch there, but hold on, hold onto those old skins, don't let go of all the ways I've always thought because that's who I am.** No, it's the way you were; it's not who you are. What about my feelings? I can't help the way I feel about her or about him or about them. What we see here is that St. Paul's entire emotional life is turned topsy-turvy by the grace of God. So what about his feelings? They are all dismissed and replaced. Conversion does that. If we are not willing to let conversion do that, then we are not willing to be converted, and we won't be. And sadly, that's the case with many, many Christian people. They are not willing to be converted. They are holding onto the old self. They don't believe that their new self is possible, which is a lack of faith. They may believe in the creed; that's not enough. You can't just believe in the creed. That's nice; it's good; it's holy and true, but not enough. **You have to believe that God can create a new self in you.** That's what this is about. **Paul**, hostile as he was to the Christian way, was nonetheless in a strange, twisted way already dedicated to God. So **God took his goodwill and his good intentions and refashioned them.** Are we willing to let God do that for us?