

APRIL 23, 2021
Friday of the 3rd Week of Easter
John 6: 52-59

“THE WAY GOD CALLS!”

From being the persecutors to become the greatest defender of the truth and Christ. This is the life story and ministry of St. Paul who together with St. Peter formed Christian communities, both Jews and Gentiles. Today’s first reading from the Acts of the Apostles describe the call of Paul, the major turning points in the growth and expansion of Gentile Christian communities. “St. Luke gives three accounts (Acts 9:1-20; 22:5-16; 26:10-18) of this momentous event. The second and third accounts are given in Paul’s own words as parts of discourses he gave. Paul also speaks about the experience in the Letter to the Galatians (Gal 1:12-17). The incident took place probably in 36 AD, about 12 years before the council of Jerusalem, which cleared the way for Gentiles to be fully incorporated in the Christian community. The council was held in AD 49.”¹

Saul, as a persecutor has direct knowledge and was involved in the killing of St. Stephen and others who were members and followers of the Way, the name for the early Christians. His mission in Damascus was to implicate and bring these people to Jerusalem to be persecuted and killed. But we know, our way is not God’s way, He has its own plan for us, and the plan of Jesus to Saul was to become Paul who will defend Christ and establish the Church by proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles.

Another character that I would like to focus on is Ananias. When he was asked by the Lord to go to Paul, he was reluctant when he said: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.”² We can sense here

¹ livingspace.sacredspace.ie

² Acts 9: 13-14 Holy Bible NRSVCE Canadian Bible Society

that he was annoyed, a bit angry of Paul because of what he did to members of the Way. But this was an extraordinary turn of events and God's ways are strange! He even said to Ananias: "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."³ Ananias obeyed, went to Paul, called him 'brother' and healed him.

My brothers and sisters, this incident was the crucial and significant chapter in the history and life of the early Church. Paul who came to Damascus to persecute Christians became the proclaimer in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God, the Bread of life who said in our gospel today: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me."⁴ Paul believed that's why, his life was nothing but for Christ even if he was persecuted too after his conversion.

My brothers and sisters, there is really hope even to those who are bad and seems they will not change. Through our prayers and good works to them, through the Holy Spirit, they will change from darkness to light with Jesus. So, don't stop praying and sacrificing for those whom we want to be near with God. Like St. Paul, they will be converted not through our power but by the Holy Spirit. There is always hope for conversion even to those people whom we considered 'persecutors and oppressors' in our lives. Also, let us also reflect our way of treating and judging others because of their past, ask for forgiveness of our own blindness and pray for constant need for conversion, so that we can share with others our encounter of Jesus in our own Damascus.

³ Acts 9: 15-16 Holy Bible NRSVCE Canadian Bible Society

⁴ John 6: 56-57 Holy Bible NRSVCE Canadian Bible Society