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25 January 2009

The Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul

As we continue to observe this Year of Saint Paul, it is a special joy for us to celebrate today the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul. Today's Feast is a reminder to each of us of the central and necessary place of conversion in our lives.

It was on the road to Damascus that the Lord Jesus illuminated Paul "and from that moment all his energy was placed at the exclusive service of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. His existence would become that of an Apostle who wants to 'become all things to all people' (I Corinthians 9:22) without reserve."¹

The average reader, perhaps, might be tempted to pause too long on certain details, such as the light from the sky, the fall to the ground, the voice that called, the new state of blindness, the curing when something like scales fall from his eyes and the fasting. However, all these details point to the heart of the event: The Risen Christ appeared as a splendid light and addressed Saul, transforming his thinking and his very life. The splendor of the Risen One left him blind; presenting also externally what the interior reality was, his blindness in regard to the truth, to the light, which is Christ. And then, his definitive "yes" to Christ in baptism reopens his eyes, and makes him truly see.²

In the first centuries of the Church, the Sacrament of Baptism was often called the "Illumination," "because this sacrament

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday Audience Address, 25 October 2006.

² Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday Audience Address, 3 September 2008.

gives light, makes one truly see."³ This is what happened to Saint Paul, and this is what happens to each of us, as well. The eyes of faith are opened and Christ, the Light of the World, shines not only upon us, but within us, as well (). This is why the Savior says to us, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14).

How well does our light shine? If someone were to observe the course of our day, would they recognize us a follower of Jesus Christ, as a member of what Saint Paul called the "Way" (Acts 22:4)? Would they find us adhering to the path laid out by Christ, or would they find us picking and choosing our own way?

This Way that we follow is more than a set of regulations and rules; it is - in the end - a relationship with Jesus Christ. This Way is a way of living, of thinking, of loving. This Way both comes from Christ and leads to him. We see, then, that

What counts is to place Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so that our identity is marked essentially by the encounter, by communion with Christ and with his Word. In his light every other value is recovered and purified from possible dross.⁴

If we do not stick to this Way - if we do not live lives centered on Christ and guided by his teachings - we cannot claim to follow the Lord.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday Audience Address, 3 September 2008.

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday Audience Address, 25 October 2006.

Saint Paul knew that this Way is not always easy, but he also knew the life and the freedom that comes from a deep devotion to Christ. For this reason he endured countless hardships and sufferings for the sake of Christ and of his Gospel. Paul never shied away from speaking the truth, regardless of what it would cost him. He knew that what was most important was to always ask, as he did on the road to Damascus, "What shall I do, sir" (Acts 22:10)? This question, we, too, must ask each day. The question that guides our life should never be, "What do I want?" but "What does the Lord want?"

We know that this past week our nation experienced an historic day with the inauguration of President Obama. But we also know that there are things to regret about this historic day, for we now have as our President most anti-life politician our nation has known.

On Friday, just one day after the March for Life protesting the Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade that legalized abortion - President Obama signed an executive order lifting a ban on federal funding of groups overseas who promote and perform abortions. Clearly, this is a large step backwards from what is civilized and noble.

President Obama is already preparing to sign an executive order that will lift federal restrictions on embryonic stem cell

research, despite the fact that such research - despite all the hype - has not yielded one single medical advance. Adult stem cell research, on the other hand, has yielded at least eighty-three medical advances.

And most importantly and tragic, President Obama is intent on signing the so-called Freedom of Choice Act the moment it comes to his desk. As you know, the Freedom of Choice Act, if passed, will require doctors and hospitals to perform abortions, even if doing so violates their conscience; etc.

Some two thousand years ago, no one thought that Julius Caesar would actually cross the Rubicon river with his troops, enter the city of Rome and declare himself Emperor. But he did. A few decades ago, no one thought a man by the name of Adolf Hitler would actually launch an extermination of the Jews. But he did. A few years ago, no one thought the day would come when this nation would inject a saline solution into a womb to burn a baby's skin until it died. But it did. No one thought the day would come when various instruments would be used to sever an infant's limbs in the womb. But it did. No one thought the day would come when a child's brain would be removed with a small vacuum. But it did. All of this came to pass, and if we do not act now and decisively, it is about to get much worse.

We can no longer sit idly by. The time has come for us to make our voices heard, to adhere to the Way laid out by Christ.

In the words of Justin Cardinal Rigali, the time has come for us to continue and increase our "respectful and impassioned protest" in defense of the unborn and of all human life.

Saint James reminds us that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20).

Saint John reminds us, "If anyone says "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (I John 4:20).

Let us all follow the words of Saint Paul: "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1). Let each of us proclaim the Gospel of Life and hold those in public service accountable to the Truth.