

Local Solemnity of the Conversion of St. Paul – January 25, 2026 – Fr. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of St. Paul, Birmingham – 5pm Sat. Vigil; 8:30 & 11am Sunday Masses – 710 words

On our present liturgical calendar there is only one feast day that is uniquely for Saint Paul – the one that we celebrate today, his Conversion. Thus it becomes, by default, the patronal feast of this Cathedral dedicated to him and also of our diocese. Today, with particular solemnity, then, we thank the Lord for giving us Saint Paul as a special patron saint and we meditate upon his extraordinary life. Paul wrote about one-fourth of the New Testament! He traveled from the Holy Land all the way to Rome, and possibly even to Spain. He was shipwrecked multiple times and imprisoned. Ultimately, he lost his head for the faith. He was an incredible man of God during his time on earth and remains an example for us all!

It all really began with the conversion of a man named Saul. The Lord intervened directly in his life, in a powerful way, as we heard in the first reading. Not that Saul was in any way worthy of God's intervention – no; in fact, he was in the process of going to persecute yet another group of Christians. But the Lord did not wait for Saul to become worthy, for he had a plan for Saul to become Paul and to become one of the greatest saints of his Church – and he carried out his plan perfectly. This, then, is an important lesson for us to take away on this feast: God does not wait until we are perfect; he is close to us always, even in our worst moments, and is always interested in bringing about the fulfillment of his plan for us.

Saul had been accustomed to being the leader. But when he was knocked off his horse and struck blind, he had to start being led by another. He literally had no other choice – and this was a special grace, too, for it taught him a lesson that is ours to learn, also: he had to submit himself to God and be led by him. Until then, he had followed his own plan; now he would start following God's. Until then, he had been going after the Church; now he would follow after Christ. This does not mean God's plan was always easy to perceive; but Paul learned about that also, for he was struck blind and so lived for a time in darkness. Very often, the next step is not clear to us. The Lord calls us to step out in faith, trusting he will guide us aright.

Yes, but the first step of faith, to be led by God – before any physical movement – must truly be a step of the heart and mind, by surrendering ourselves to God's will and asking for its fulfillment in us. We turn to him in our hearts and in our minds and we say, "Thy will be done!"¹ – "Be it done unto me according to thy word!"² This is our ongoing process of conversion, but it pleases God to carry it out in us also. He has not waited until we were perfect, for none of us is – yet. No, he has begun it already, out of his great goodness and great love for us, so that – please God – he will perfectly fulfill his plan in us as well. Through the intercession of Saint Paul we, too, say: God's will be done! And we ask the Lord to increase our faith.

It is important that we remember that the word "conversion" means "a turning around". Saint Paul had literally done this after being stopped in his tracks – he changed directions, no longer going after the Church, but following after Christ Jesus. Every aspect of who we are must ultimately be turned toward the Lord, for our conversion to be complete – for us, in the words of Christ, to "be perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect".³ Then, we will be able to say, with Saint Paul, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me".⁴ May this great saint pray for each one of us, so that we can "live by faith in the son of God, who has loved [us] and gave himself for [us]"⁵ – so we may become all he wants us to be. Amen.

¹ Cf. the Lord's Prayer.

² Luke 1:38.

³ Matthew 5:48.

⁴ Galatians 2:20.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, Communion Antiphon.