

## Reflection for Epiphany 3 Conversion of St Paul. Acts 9:1-22

Today we celebrate the conversion of St Paul, one of those momentous events that many might have believed to be impossible. Luke writing in The Acts of the Apostles certainly fills the account with plenty of drama. “Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” gives us a terrifying image of a Pharisee filled a zealous mission to persecute all the followers of Jesus. It is interesting to speculate just how it was possible to arrest, imprison and possibly even murder, those who had chosen to follow Jesus, without authority other than that of the High Priests. Saul sets off with letters of authority from these same High Priests to Damascus. Could it be that doubts were already creeping into Saul’s mind. Did he begin to ask himself just why these people, and there were more and more, why did not they just give up all this silly nonsense? Could it have been that despite this angry exterior Saul’s certainty about the correctness of his mission was under pressure. It is well known that along the road to Damascus something very dramatic happened. Did Saul have a fit, possibly an epileptic fit, or even a stroke? Amid which he hears God speaking to him, asking why he was continuing to persecute God. The King James version has, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks!” in other words, you are never going to win. The arch persecutor has been brought low. Saul continues to Damascus a broken man. Once again, we get another story of extraordinary faith from this man Ananias. Ananias has a vision when he is being told to go to Saul, who at this moment is praying and has seen a vision where he sees you, Ananias, coming to you. We can imagine the reaction, ‘What me go to him! He will imprison me straight away; you know what sort of a man he is! Go there, me, not likely!’ But go he does and lays his hands on Saul. The effect is immediate, something like scales fall from Saul’s eyes and he begins to see. This sight could have been simply physical but also could have been mental. Saul begins to see with a new vision.

So begins the ministry of Paul Apostle to the Gentiles. His letters to the young churches form a large part of the New Testament. He works tirelessly and travels throughout Asia to spread the Gospel. His efforts were not without hardship; he initially struggled with credibility and later faced persecution and imprisonment but continued. He may not always have been an easy man, but he was certain of his calling as one chosen by God.

What, then, do we take from this? God chooses the most unlikely people and gives them the strength to do what they are called to do. Ananias heard God's call and despite his fears followed the call. We are all called to do something, and we too must be aware of our own calling. However unlikely it may seem, if God could call Saul, he does call us to do something great or small.

*God has created me to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission - I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do his work. I should be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place while not intending it; if I do but keep his commandments.*      Cardinal Newman.