

The Festival of the Conversion of St. Paul
St. Matthew 19:27-30
January 25th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Inherit Eternal Life

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The conversion of St. Paul by the Lord + Jesus on the road to Damascus is a blessing to the Church; it is a blessing to us. For, he is the Apostle who was sent to the Gentiles. He was sent to bring the good news of the Gospel of the Lord + Jesus Christ to us. Like St. Peter and the other Apostles, he was called by the Lord + Jesus to preach the Word of God. Our Lord tells Ananias that He was going to show St. Paul just how much he was going to suffer in His Name. He suffered many things for the sake of the Name of the Lord + Jesus.

In the Gospel reading, St. Peter asks our Lord + Jesus what they were going to receive for leaving all and following Him. The answer to St. Paul was that he was going to suffer many things. Indeed, St. Paul did suffer many things for his preaching of the Gospel. The other Apostles suffered many things, as well. Many of them were martyred, that is, killed for their witness of the Lord + Jesus as the Lord and Savior of all mankind. But although they suffered many things for their proclamation of the Gospel, our Lord + Jesus has a different message to tell us from the Gospel of the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew.

The Lord + Jesus does focus His answer to St. Peter on what woes they could expect. He focuses His reply on the rewards that they will receive. They will inherit eternal life. This is the Lord's promise to the twelve Apostles. They will rule with the Lord + Jesus on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. They will be given an eternal reward.

This promise is for us as well, and for all those who follow the Lord + Jesus in faith; who through faith in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus are justified by the Lord + Jesus. We will inherit eternal life. We will be united together with Sts. Peter and Paul, and all the Apostles, and with all those who have gone before us in the faith in Heaven for all eternity. This is the promise that our Lord + Jesus has for us today. It is the same promise that He gave to His Apostles. It is the same promise that they preached to the Jews and the Gentiles. And it is the same promise for which they suffered and were martyred.

St. Paul does not have a very favorable beginning as a Christian. He was blinded by the Light; the Light of the world. He had to be led by his companions into Damascus. Upon his arrival we are told by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke, that he fasted for three days, neither eating food or

drinking. Like our Lord + Jesus Who was in the grave for three days, St. Paul was blind and fasted for three days. Such things have driven many men away from the Lord + Jesus. Many people think that being a Christian will be followed by good days filled with a glorious life. St. Paul shows us that that is not necessarily the case. He was to suffer many things for the Gospel of the Lord.

We may also suffer many things for following the Lord + Jesus instead of the ways of the world. We may be put at odds with those closest to us: brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, wife and children. We may lose our homes or our land. But we can take our cue from how St. Paul reacts to his being blinded by the Lord + Jesus. What does he do? We are told that while he fasted, he also prayed. He forsook food and water to speak to the Lord + Jesus. We can be pretty sure that he spent some of that time in confession of his sins for having persecuted the Church.

The Lord + Jesus in answer to his prayers sends Ananias, who restored his sight and filled him with the Holy Ghost by baptizing him in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. His sins were washed away. He was regenerated. He immediately went to the synagogue and began preaching the good news of the Lord + Jesus Christ, converting many to believe on the Lord + Jesus.

The conversion of St. Paul reminds us of our conversion and the conversion of the whole world. Wherever the Gospel is preached in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution, He is there by His Holy Ghost convicting men of their sins, and leading them into repentance. Wherever the Lord + Jesus is present with His means of grace, He is regenerating the souls of all those who believe on Him and His promises.

This is what the Lord + Jesus is getting at in the Gospel reading from the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew when He talks about the time of regeneration. This time is now. The Lord + Jesus sits on His throne of glory interceding for us to the heavenly Father. We have been regenerated—renewed—by the Holy Ghost through the waters of Holy Baptism. Our sins are been washed away, and we are clean and free from sin. Our adversary, the devil, cannot bring an accusation against us, for we cling in faith to the promises of the Lord + Jesus. He has fulfilled the Law perfectly for us, and He has suffered and died our punishment on the tree of the holy cross. This message has gone into all the world through the preaching of St. Paul, St. Peter and the other Apostles. This message continues to go forth through the faithful preaching of the called and ordained servants of the Word today.

Just as St. Paul was converted and believed on the Lord + Jesus; just as St. Peter and the other Apostles left all and followed the Lord + Jesus; all those who heard their message of salvation in the works and merits of the Christ alone were converted and believed on the Lord + Jesus. They left all and followed Him, for in Him was found life and salvation. He is the only One Who has the Words of Life. He is the only One Who can open our blind eyes, and unstop our deaf ears to see His works for us, and to hear His good deeds done on our behalf. All these, including those of us here today, will receive the rewards for which our Lord and Savior suffered and died. We will inherit eternal life.

We may endure hardships in this life. Or, we may not. But those who cling to the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus, and not to their own virtues and self-proclaimed good works, will inherit eternal life.

Our Lord + Jesus ends the Gospel reading with a stern warning for us, however. Those who do desire to save themselves by their own virtues and good works, those who deny the Lord + Jesus, or who look for salvation in other false gods, will be last. That is, they will not be a part of the company of Heaven, they will have condemned themselves to Hell. They who think they are succeeding at salvation by their own doing and striving, or who think erroneously that everyone who is basically good will end up in Heaven, including themselves; they who think they are first, will be last.

Therefore, let us not consider ourselves greater than we ought. Let us remember what poor, miserable sinners we truly are. We daily sin much, and are in constant need of our Lord's mercy and grace. Daily do we need renewal of the Holy Ghost. Daily do we need to live in our Holy Baptism; drowning the Old Adam with all of his sinful desires, so that by the working of the Holy Ghost we may rise again daily as new creations before our Lord + Jesus Christ. Through our daily remembrance of our Holy Baptism the Old Man in us is converted into a new man by the working of the Holy Ghost; we are daily being regenerated; daily are our sins being washed away when we remember the great gift that we receive from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ.

This daily washing and regeneration of the Holy Ghost will carry us through to the day when our Lord + Jesus will call us from this vale of tears to our eternal home in Heaven. Our Lord + Jesus won for us eternal life when He offered His life as a ransom for us. After this life, when we have suffered many things, even as St. Paul and the other Apostles did, we will join with them and inherit the eternal life that has been won for us by our Lord's suffering and death.

On that Day we will no longer endure hardship or pain, but we will receive the reward purchased for us by the innocent and precious Blood of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. May the Lord + Jesus grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!