

Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany (2021)

by Fr Nick Mezacapa

Saint Paul, the apostle, is incredibly changed by a post-resurrection experience with Jesus! And it is an amazing story. Paul was a Pharisee, an Orthodox Jew. With the growing popularity of the “Jesus Movement”, Paul had identified that Jesus was a problem. That the resurrected Messiah was going to cause trouble. So he set out to squelch and end the movement that Jesus had led. He traveled the country to catch up with any of of Jesus's followers, and to forcibly quiet their growing popularity and voices. He led the effort against “The Way”, as it was known. Then came the “Damascus Road Experience”, when Paul had a mystical encounter with the Risen Christ. Out of a bright light, so the story goes, Paul hears a voice, a gentle, and yet authoritative voice that asks, “Paul, Paul, why do you persecute me?”... “Paul, Paul, why do you persecute me?” Paul emerges from the encounter blind and instructed to go into Damascus and to remain there for three days...

After three days, his sight is restored, but more importantly, he emerges with his temperament and his passion turned 180°! He is no longer the persecutor of those who believe in resurrection of Jesus the Messiah, but he becomes the number one proponent of the resurrection of Jesus Christ! The number one fan and teacher! His sight is restored. He's transformed and has a new vision! And from then on, he just gives it everything he's got to promote the Gospel. He's all in. As we read today, he's a “slave to all”... Ready to do what it

took to win people to Christ. To convince them of the power of this story. To Jews, he says, he became a Jew. To those under the law, he became one under the law. To weak, he became weak, to win the weak. We became all things to all people in order to save some! In order to deliver the power of this love message, this new relationship with God... the word incarnate in Jesus Christ. All because of his new vision, this new self.

Throughout history and time, people of this world have had countless Damascus Road Experiences. Just think of the times when, there's been means, and hatred, and from above we hear "World, world, why do you continue to hate?" And there have been, and still are, all those wars, and a voice from above agonizes, "World, World why can't you find peace?" And there are fights on our streets, and a voice from above cries, "World, World, why can't you just love your neighbor?".

Paul's vision changed, and he exchanged what he was, for what he needed to be, a representative of Christ, from then on. And the question is... why can't we? Why can't we make that kind of transformation in our lives? Because we know the story too. We know its power. We carry it in our hearts. Let's adopt together, a new vision, today, and pledge to bring good news and the transformation of God in Christ, into our world. Amen.