

IV. PRAYER

I bless Thee, Jesus, for the great mercy bestowed on St. Paul in changing him from a fierce persecutor to an ardent apostle of the Church.

And you, O great saint, obtain for me a heart docile to grace, conversion from my main defect and a full configuration to Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul the Apostle: pray for us.

Prayer for the General Chapter

O divine Spirit, who, sent by the Father in the name of Jesus,
infallibly assist and guide the Church,
pour over our Chapter the fullness of your gifts.

O gentle Master and Comforter,
enlighten our minds,
let abundant fruit ripen from this Chapter;
let our commitment
of sanctification and apostolate take new vigour;
spread ever further the light
and the power of the Gospel among men.

O sweet Guest of souls,
confirm our minds in the truth,
dispose the hearts of all to obedience,
so that the deliberations of the Chapter
find generous assent and full compliance.

Renew in our Family
the wonders of a new Pentecost.
Grant that, united in unanimous and more intense prayer,
around Mary, Mother of Jesus, and the Apostles,
spread the kingdom of the Divine Master,
in the spirit of the Apostle Paul. Amen.



ANIMATION PAPER 1 (OCTOBER)

“CALLED...” AS SAUL

THE PAULINE AND HIS CHARISMATIC ROOTS

I. PRAYER

Invocation to the Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit,
through the intercession of the Queen of Pentecost:
heal my mind from recklessness, ignorance,
forgetfulness, hardness, prejudice, error, perversion,
and conceive Wisdom, Jesus Christ-Truth, in all things.
Heal my sentimentality from indifference, distrust,
bad inclination, passions, feelings, affections,
And conceive tastes, feelings, inclinations,
Jesus Christ-Life, in all things.
Heal my will from idleness, lightness, inconstancy, sloth,
obstinacy, bad habits,
and conceive Jesus Christ-Life in me,
the new love to what Jesus Christ loves
and Jesus Christ himself.
Divinely elevate
intelligence with the gift of Intellect,
wisdom with the gift of Wisdom,
knowledge with Knowledge,
prudence with Counsel,
justice with Mercy,
fortitude with the gift of spiritual strength,
temperance with the fear of God.

II. READING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

From the Acts of the Apostles (9:1-22)

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision^[a] a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

because his Christian life and mission are not that of a solitary and individualistic man, but of a member of the Church. Saul, therefore, will be chosen and sent to the mission by a community cooperating with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2) and will carry it out in collaboration with many other apostles and cooperators.

The baptised Saul "remained for some days with the disciples who were in Damascus" (Acts 9:19). The newly called apostle is strengthened and takes on the first missionary tasks under the care of the community.

Comparison with the Word of God

In the light of this word, read the passage from the *Instrumentum laboris*: RECOGNISE OUR SITUATION. Communion and witnessing (p. 14).

The bitter assessment of the condition of our communities is not intended to discourage us from making every effort to heal them. This diagnosis is the starting point for our common journey into the future. The story of St. Paul reminds us that each of us has been given by God to the community and that God has given each of us the community of the Church, the Congregation and a local community.

An essential element of our identity as consecrated persons is the community that cares for us, in which we are formed as apostles and which sends us out on mission. At the same time, it is a place where we build fraternal relationships, overcoming all prejudices and difficulties (see Ananias), and where we are sent by God to serve one another.

Personal Resonances

Do you see your religious community as a gift and a task from God?

How do you fulfil your responsibility for the community?

How do you live the brotherhood in the community? Do you feel like a brother to all Paulines and are you able to treat them as your brothers? What can you improve in this respect?

How do you live your dependence on others? Do you see God's will and plan in it?

Are you ready to accept someone's help and submit to someone else's direction?

our Divine Master, has such transforming power. The miracle that happened to Saul near Damascus remains the archetype of the changes that must take place in every Pauline to become a holy, zealous and credible apostle of Christ. We do not lack any grace from God. The beginning of the transformation is always an encounter with the Divine Master.

Personal resonances

Saul was thrown to the ground and temporarily blinded by Jesus. How would you interpret these means of transformation in relation to yourself?

If you were in Saul's place, what would you hear from Jesus? How would Jesus present himself to you?

How would you assess your ability to communicate, to dialogue with God and people?

3. Called to communion with the community

The next step in Saul's transformation was his introduction into the Christian community (Acts 9:10-22). When Saul lost his sight, he realised how much he needed the help of other people. The Pharisee was prepared to enter the community and to cooperate with others: he was led by the hand by his companions to Damascus and waited for the fulfilment of Jesus' words: "you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6).

Three days after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul began a period of darkness, fasting and prayer. It is a time of spiritual preparation for the grace of baptism (Acts 9:18) and inclusion in the community. It is also a time of God's activity, who calls Ananias and persuades him to serve the Pharisee.

"*Saul, brother*". It is significant that these are the first words Ananias addresses to Saul. However, it was not Ananias who chose Saul as a brother, it was not he who appointed the Pharisee as a brother, and therefore a member of the community. Ananias obeyed God's command. It was Jesus himself who included Saul in the community and made him a brother of the others: "He is the instrument I have chosen for myself". (Acts 9:15)!

In Saul's vocation to be an apostle, a proclaimer of the Gospel and a saint (Acts 9:15-16), the vocation to the community is therefore organically inscribed,

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

III. FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Saul before the event in Damascus

St Luke briefly describes the Pharisee Saul in relation to the Christians (Acts 9:1-2; cf. Gal 1:13): he was their declared enemy, he hated them and wanted to destroy this new community. He did so with full conviction and commitment. He was the initiator of the persecution of the Christians of Damascus, and to this end he obtained the appropriate permission from the Sanhedrin.

This is how Saul understood and realised his fidelity to the law, and therefore his piety: "I ferociously persecuted the Church of God and devastated it, surpassing in Judaism most of my contemporaries and fellow countrymen, fierce as I was in upholding the traditions of the fathers" (Gal 1:14). He was completely convinced of the rightness of his actions: 'as for zeal, a persecutor of the Church; as for the righteousness that comes from keeping the Law, blameless' (Phil 3:6).

Before meeting Christ, Saul was faithful to his own vision of piety, convinced that the way he worshipped God was right. He was characterised by self-referentiality, he was a commander rather than a listener, a self-sufficient activist rather than a man committed to cooperation with others. Despite his good intentions, such attitudes and actions were not in accord with the will of God.

Comparison with the Word of God

In the light of this word, read the passage from the *Instrumentum laboris*: INTERPRETING in the light of faith (p. 16-20).

Do not look for literal analogies, but rather understand the situation in which we find ourselves. Despite good intentions and many efforts, it often seems that the essential goals of the Pauline consecrated and apostolic life are missing. It happens that in the actions we perform, we do not do the works of God or, by omitting various actions, we do not follow his will.

Personal resonances

What does the reading of this text invite you to do?

How can you revitalise your spiritual life and live your Pauline vocation more fully?

What prevents you from giving a clear and reliable witness to your Pauline religious life?

What challenges do you face in applying the ideal of Pauline apostolic life to yourself?

2. Event of the encounter

The transformation of Saul the persecutor into an apostle occurred during his personal encounter with the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9).

“Suddenly a light from heaven enveloped him”. The initiator of the encounter is God, but Saul, who has been given the opportunity to change his life, will have to respond to grace and cooperate with it.

“He falls to the ground”. The encounter with Jesus was a turning point, it closed one stage in Saul’s story and opened a new one. The Pharisee received the opportunity for a new beginning. In his life, Jesus’ words come true: “If the grain of wheat does not die when it falls into the earth, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). This is a symbolic moment when Saul lost the certainty based on himself. He was a leader, controlling his own life and deciding the lives of others. He was sure of his arguments and actions. Now he is weak, small, humble....

“Saul, Saul!” Jesus was not mistaken, he calls the Pharisee by name, he knows him and makes himself known to him; he sought out Saul and found him in his ways that were not the ways of God.

“Why do you persecute me?” In the light of Jesus’ words, Saul’s actions against Christians are a struggle with God himself. Jesus reveals himself as a member of the Christian community, he identifies himself with the persecuted Church.

“Who are you O Lord?” Saul does not yet know who the Stranger is, but he recognises his supremacy and power, he shows respect. The encounter becomes dialogue. It is in dialogue that Saul knows who he is talking to, and dialogue allows him to discover the identity of the interlocutor. By asking a question, Saul expects an answer, he opens himself to accept the words of Jesus, and so also the will of God.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting!” Jesus presents himself to Saul. We find here an analogy with the moment when God appeared to Moses (Ex 3:14). Jesus also appears in the context of Saul’s persecution of the Christians. The whole event aims to change Saul’s identity and to formulate a new answer to the question of who Jesus is: He is the one whose name Saul will bring “before the nations and kings and the children of Israel” and for whose name Saul will have to suffer greatly.

“But rise up and enter the city, and you will be told what you must do”. Jesus invites Saul to enter a new phase of life, according to the will of God. It is not Jesus’ will to leave Saul on earth defeated, bankrupt from his previous life. God has a plan for Saul! However, he does not immediately reveal all the details of this path, but points out to Saul the need to listen to others. He opens him up to accept help from others and points to the need for cooperation.

“...opened his eyes, he saw nothing...”. Saul’s blindness is a symbol of a real reset of his way of thinking, evaluating and experiencing reality. The light of God overcame the darkness of self-referential Saul. In the beginning, the Pharisee must experience the need for others, he must trust his companions who “leading him by the hand, they led him to Damascus”.

Comparison with the Word of God

In the light of this word, read the passage from the *Instrumentum laboris*: RECOGNISE OUR SITUATION. The characteristics of a true apostle (p. 13-14).

This is our diagnosis that we urgently need an experience of God to rekindle our love for the Pauline charism and apostolic passion. Jesus Christ,