

# FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

23<sup>rd</sup>– 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023

## Saints this Week

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## Conversion of St Paul

25<sup>th</sup> January

### Collect

**O GOD**, who taught the whole world through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Paul: draw us, we pray, nearer to you through the example of him whose conversion we celebrate today, and to make us witnesses to your truth in the world. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

## Reading

*Acts 22:3-16*

*St Paul tells of his conversion*

<sup>3</sup> 'I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cili'cia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gama'li-el, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

<sup>6</sup> 'As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' <sup>8</sup> And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' <sup>9</sup> Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' <sup>11</sup> And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

<sup>12</sup> 'And one Anani'as, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; <sup>15</sup> for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

## Reflection

**MOST** Saints' Days mark the death of saints and their passing into glory. The notable exceptions are St John the Baptist and Our Lady, the beginning of whose lives are also celebrated. Two of the apostles – Peter and Paul – have not only their day of death commemorated but also a notable stage in their life. In the case of St Peter, it is the Chair of St Peter (22<sup>nd</sup> February) and in the case of St Paul, it is the feast of his conversion, celebrated today. In an older version of the Roman Calendar, the feast of

the Chair of St Peter was celebrated on 18<sup>th</sup> January, kept by some non-Catholics as 'the Confession of St Peter', celebrating the famous incident at Caesarea Philippi where Simon Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. The two feasts, 18<sup>th</sup> January and 25<sup>th</sup> January, inspired the Episcopalian friar, Fr Paul Watson, to invent the Octave (later 'Week') of Prayer for Christian Unity in 1908. The point was that the St Peter event is of particular significance for Catholics whilst the preaching of St Paul and the phenomenon of adult conversion to Christ is of particular significance for Protestants. Both emphases are important. For Catholics, what is crucial is belonging to the Household of Faith, the Ark of Salvation, a membership which begins at Baptism, often at a very early age. For Protestants, what is crucial is coming to a living Faith in Christ, something which often happens in adulthood. So, where Catholics emphasise the founding of the Church at Caesarea Philippi, the role of St Peter, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Protestants emphasise the turning point in life where, just as Saul the Pharisee became Paul the Apostle, so someone lacking a living Faith has a life-changing encounter with Christ.

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## **Collect for Week 3**

**ALMIGHTY** ever-living God, direct our actions according to your good pleasure, that in the name of your beloved Son we may abound in good works. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

# Monday of Week 3 (1)

## Reading

*Hebrews 9:15, 23-28*

### *Christ's Sacrifice Takes Away Sin*

<sup>15</sup> Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant....

<sup>23</sup> Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup> For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. <sup>25</sup> Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; <sup>26</sup> for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup> And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

## Reflection

**CHAPTER** Nine of the Letter to the Hebrews consists of a lengthy comparison between the death of Jesus and the annual Atonement ritual in the Holy Place of the Jerusalem Temple. This took place in the autumn (Yom Kippur) and Pope Benedict made the interesting point that, though we associate the Crucifixion and Resurrection with the Passover, a spring feast, the relevance of Yom Kippur to the sacrificial death of Christ, gives us a twin focus in the autumn. Indeed, for those in the Southern Hemisphere, Yom Kippur is in springtime and the Passover in autumn. The comparison between the Jewish annual ritual and the Christian 'once for all' sacrifice on Calvary is disguised by the liturgical year in that we remember the death of Christ every Good Friday – not to mention every day – no less than the observant Jew commemorates Yom Kippur each year. Nevertheless there is a stark contrast between the High Priest, offering the blood of bulls and goats, and Christ the Eternal High Priest, offering his own blood.

## Tuesday of Week 3 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 10:1-10*

*Christ's Sacrifice once for all*

**10** For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. **2** Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshippers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. **3** But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. **4** For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.

**5** Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

**'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
**6** in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.  
**7** Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do thy will, O God,'  
as it is written of me in the roll of the book.'**

**8** When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings' (these are offered according to the law), **9** then he added, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. **10** And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

### Reflection

**TODAY'S** reading from Hebrews (10:1-10) is the first part of a summary of the argument so far. The second and concluding part of the summary will come in tomorrow's reading (Hebrews 10:11-18). Today we are looking again at the ineffectiveness of the sacrificial system. It involves endless repetition – year on year – of the sacrifice of the blood of bulls and goats, which patently does not work as a sin offering. If it did, the worshippers would no longer be aware of sin and would not need to return to the place of sacrifice year after year. And so we learn that the coming of Christ into the world puts an end to all that, precisely in a way which is foretold in Scripture. Well, not quite precisely as we find it: the quotation from Ps 40, like similar quotations, is from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. It is not that the earlier system was wrong. It was honoured by God but then abolished by the later system. We are familiar with this

notion of earlier and later versions: St Thomas Aquinas, in the hymn *Tantum ergo*, sung at Benediction, at the Transfer of the Holy Eucharist on Maundy Thursday, and at Corpus Christi, reminds us that 'Types and shadows have their ending, for the newer rite is here'. There is the old and there is the new. An Old Covenant and a New Covenant, each undergirded by sacrifice.

## Wednesday of Week 3 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 10:11-18*

*The Priestly Order of Melchizedek*

Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. <sup>14</sup> For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. <sup>15</sup> And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

<sup>16</sup> **'This is the covenant that I will make with them  
after those days, says the Lord:  
I will put my laws on their hearts,  
and write them on their minds,'**

<sup>17</sup> then he adds,

**'I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more.'**

<sup>18</sup> Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

### Reflection

**YESTERDAY'S** passage, Hebrews 10:1-10, is the first half of a longer section, of which today's passage, Hebrews 10:11-18, is the second half. Having contrasted the ineffectiveness of the sacrifices of the Temple with the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice, and contrasting the many priests of the Old Covenant with the One High Priest of the New Covenant, we conclude that Christ's sacrifice is once and for all, and brings about an entirely new situation. For now God remembers our sins no more: the forgiveness brought about by Christ means that there is no longer any

offering for sin. We notice that this High Priest sits at the right hand of God, itself a single event, which contrasts with the priests of the temple, who, over and over again, have to stand to make the offerings for sin. The sacrifice of Christ perfects 'for all time those who are sanctified' and to this new state of affairs, this New Covenant, the Holy Spirit is the witness. The words here, slightly altered to make the writer's point, are from Jeremiah 31:33-34. We get 'hearts and minds' rather than 'minds and hearts' because it is with the whole heart that we are invited in the Book of Deuteronomy to serve the Lord.

## Thursday of Week 3 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 10:19-25*

#### *A Call to Persevere*

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; <sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

### Reflection

**BY NOW** we have studied the main thrust of the Epistle to the Hebrews: the sacrifice of Christ the eternal High Priest, once offered, has replaced the annual sin-offerings, the blood of bulls and goats, offered by the Temple priesthood. The priesthood of Christ is without beginning and end, not in the lineage of Aaron but after the timeless example of Melchizedek, a one-off, mythical figure. It is time now for us to look at embracing the truth and draw near to the sanctuary, to which we have privileged access through the Blood of Christ. We are not only concerned with entering the sanctuary (vv. 24-25) but finding fellowship one with another within the earthly sanctuary. Entering the sanctuary is something we can do with confidence, since we approach with 'a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water' (v.22). So: faith, forgiveness, baptism. But, as an answer to

the often-expressed belief that 'you don't have to go to Church to be a Christian', we notice the constant use of 'we' and 'us', rather than the singular forms, the admonition 'to stir up one another to love and good works' and the specific instruction 'not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some'. Christian believers meet together for 'encouraging one another...all the more as [we] see the Day drawing near.' As we look for the coming of the Kingdom, we support one another in work and prayer.

## Friday of Week 3 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 10:32-39*

*Remember the hard struggle with sufferings*

Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, <sup>33</sup> sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. <sup>34</sup> For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. <sup>35</sup> Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. <sup>36</sup> For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

<sup>37</sup> **'For yet a little while,  
and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry;  
<sup>38</sup> but my righteous one shall live by faith,  
and if he shrinks back,  
my soul has no pleasure in him.'**

<sup>39</sup> But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.

### Reflection

**HAD WE** carried on where we left off yesterday – instead of missing out verses 26-31 – we should have encountered a warning of judgment, aimed specifically at those who intentionally sin. We are talking here about evil acts, not peccadilloes. Sinning 'unintentionally' or 'unwittingly' seems to be covered by various texts from the Jewish Law (Lev 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 5:15; Num 15:27-29; 35:11; Deut 19:4; Josh 20:3, 9). The matter in these cases is serious and when the sin is committed deliberately there is,



says the Letter to the Hebrews, no further forgiveness available for those who have already received the forgiveness of baptism. It is in the light of this stern warning that today's extract offers us encouragement. It could be summed up as: you have come so far along the road, don't throw it all away now!

## Saturday of Week 3 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19*

*Abraham looked forward to the city whose builder and maker is God*

**11** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the men of old received divine approval. **3** By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.....

**8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. **9** By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. **10** For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. **11** By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

**13** These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. **14** For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. **15** If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

**17** By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.'**19** He considered

that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence he did receive him back, and this was a symbol.

## **Reflection**

**CHAPTER 11** of the Letter to the Hebrews gives us a great list of heroes of the Faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Today's extract from the chapter deals principally with Abraham and Sarah. The burden of the message is that 'faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen'. We are not reflecting on the good deeds that these leading figures managed to perform but on the tenacity of their faith. Faith, as we learn from Abraham's preparedness to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice – a sacrifice which was not required of him – is belief and trust in the promises of God, promises of which these figures could catch a glimpse but promises which would not be realised within their own lifetimes.

