

"Do you remember who Jesus is?"

In his 29 March general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechetical cycle on apostolic zeal with the first of two audiences about the example of St. Paul.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

In the path of catechesis on apostolic zeal, let us start today to look at some figures who, in different ways and

times, bore exemplary witness to what passion for the Gospel means. And the first witness is naturally the Apostle Paul. I would like to devote these two catecheses to him.

And the history of Paul of Tarsus is emblematic in this regard. In the first chapter of the Letter to the Galatians, as in the narration of the Acts of the Apostles, we can see that his zeal for the Gospel appears after his conversion, and takes the place of his previous zeal for Judaism. He was a man who was zealous about the law of Moses for Judaism, and after his conversion, this zeal continued, but to proclaim, to preach Jesus Christ. Paul loved Jesus. Saul – Paul's first name – was already zealous, but Christ converts his zeal: from the Law the Gospel. His zeal first wanted to destroy the Church, whereas after it builds it up. We might ask ourselves: what happened, that passed from destruction to

construction? What changed in Paul? In what way was his zeal, his striving for the glory of God, transformed? What happened there?

Saint Thomas Aquinas teaches that passion, from the moral point of view, is neither good nor evil: its virtuous use makes it morally good, sin makes it bad.^[1] In Paul's case, what changed him is not a simple idea or a conviction: it was the encounter, this word, it was the encounter with the risen Lord – do not forget this, it is the encounter with the Lord that changes a life – it was the encounter with the risen Lord that transformed his entire being. Paul's humanity, his passion for God and his glory was not annihilated, but transformed, “converted” by the Holy Spirit. The only one who can change our hearts, change, is the Holy Spirit. And it was so for every aspect of his life. Just as it happens in the Eucharist: the

bread and wine do not disappear, but become the Body and Blood of Christ. Paul's zeal remains, but it becomes the zeal of Christ. It changes direction but the zeal is the same.

The Lord is served with our humanity, with our prerogatives and our characteristics, but what changes everything is not an idea, but rather the very life itself, as Paul himself says: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" – it changes you from within, the encounter with Jesus Christ changes you from within, it makes you another person – "the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 *Cor* 5:17). If one is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, this is the meaning of being a new creation.

Becoming Christian is not a masquerade, that changes your face, no! If you are Christian, your heart is changed, but if you are a Christian in appearance, this will not do: masquerading Christians, no, they

will not do. The true change is of the heart. And this happened to Paul.

The passion for the Gospel is not a matter of comprehension or studies – you can study all the theology you want, you can study the Bible and all that, and become atheist or worldly, it is not a question of studies; in history there have been many atheist theologians, no! Study is useful but it does not generate the new life of grace; rather, to convert means going through that same experience of “fall and resurrection” that Saul/Paul lived and which is at the origin of the transfiguration of his apostolic zeal. Indeed, as Saint Ignatius says: “For it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies.”^[2] Every one of us, think. “I am a religious” – “Fine” – “I pray” – “Yes” – “I try to obey the commandments” – “Yes” – “But where is Jesus in your life?” – “Ah, no, I do the things the Church

commands.” But Jesus, where is he? Have you encountered Jesus, have you spoken with Jesus? If you pick up the Gospel or talk with Jesus, do you remember who Jesus is? And this is something that we very often lack; a Christianity, I would say, not without Jesus, but with an abstract Jesus... No! How Jesus entered your life, how he entered the life of Paul, and when Jesus enters, everything changes. Many times, we have heard comments on people: “But look at him, he was a wretch and now he is a good man, she is a good woman... who changed them? Jesus, they found Jesus. Has your Christian life changed? “No, more or less, yes...”. If Jesus did not enter your life, it did not change. You can be Christian only from the outside. No, Jesus must enter and this changes you, and this happened to Paul. It is finding Jesus, and this is why Paul said that Christ’s love drives us, it is what takes you forward. The same thing happened,

this change, to all the saints, who went forward when they found Jesus.

We can reflect further on the change that takes place in Paul, who from a persecutor became an apostle of Christ. We note that there is a sort of paradox in him: indeed, as long as he feels he is righteous before God, he feels authorized to persecute, to arrest, even to kill, as in the case of Stephen; but when, enlightened by the Risen Lord, he discovers he was a “blasphemer and persecutor” (cf. *1 Tim* 1:13) – this is what he says of himself, “I formerly blasphemed and persecuted” – then he starts to be truly capable of loving. And this is the way. If one of us says, “Ah, thank you Lord, because I am a good person, I do good things, I do not commit major sins...”, this is not a good path, this is the path of self-sufficiency, it is a path that does not justify you, it makes you turn up

your nose... This is an elegant Catholic, but an elegant Catholic is not a holy Catholic: he is elegant. The true Catholic, the true Christian is one who receives Jesus within, which changes your heart. This is the question I ask you all today: what does Jesus mean for me? Did I let him enter my heart, or do I keep him within reach but so that he does not really enter within? Have I let myself be changed by him? Or is Jesus just an idea, a theology that goes ahead... And this is zeal, when one finds Jesus and feels the fire, like Paul, and must preach Jesus, must talk about Jesus, must help people, must do good things. When one finds the idea of Jesus, he or she remains an ideologue of Christianity, and this does not justify, only Jesus justifies us. May the Lord help us find Jesus, encounter Jesus, and may this Jesus change our life from within and help us to help others. Thank you.

[1] Cfr. *Quaestio “De veritate”* 24, 7.

[2] *Spiritual Exercises*, Annotations, 2, 4.

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