

A Call to Conversion

Today reminds me of the time in my ministry with my husband Harry in which we offered a “Rite of Blessing” for expectant parents, held in their homes. One year we had chosen a mutually convenient Thursday evening, which turned out to be January 25th, The Conversion of St. Paul. We wondered what it would be like to use the lessons appointed for this particular feast day instead of the usual Sunday Lectionary readings. We wondered also how this couple might respond to readings about the conversion of Paul, thinking that these lessons might be a bit strange for expectant parents to meditate on. I felt uncertain about the wisdom of honoring this secondary feast day as we knew very little about this couple as they were friends of parishioners and we had barely met them ourselves.

‘Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

‘With this in mind, I was travelling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.” I asked, “Who are you, Lord?” The Lord answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

‘After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. Acts 26:12-23

To our surprise when the scripture was introduced, the young father-to-be, coming from another tradition and new to the Episcopal Church, was himself surprised to have a special day set aside to honor the Apostle Paul. Smiling broadly at the “coincidence” of the date we had mutually chosen, he declared that Paul was his favorite Bible character and felt it most appropriate, even providential that we could honor this feast day.

More surprising to us however was his insight into the Scripture reading, declaring that this Blessing event was something of his own conversion experience. He was feeling very powerfully a call from God to change from being just a young man and husband but now to be a father, a parent! For him it would require a total conversion in his way of being and thinking,

and he knew it was a call from God – as important for him as was the Road to Damascus experience for Paul.

We developed the following questions as part of our reflection time with this expectant couple as we awaited the birth of their new child and their new role as parents:

- How is it that God is calling you to conversion or change in light of what you have seen or heard?
- In your experience how does being a parent or anticipation of actually being a parent require a “process of conversion”?
- Does the process of parenting also call you into a deepening spiritual experience or a spiritual conversion of some kind?

How do you minister with expectant parents?

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