

Conversion of Saint Paul / III Epiphany 2026

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Acts 9.1-20



In January 1947, legendary country-western singer Hank Williams was sleeping inebriated in the back seat of a car after returning from a show in a small town in Arkansas. His mother, Lily, was driving and woke him up when she said “I just saw the light”, as they approached the city of Montgomery, Alabama.

Williams thought about what his mother had just said. He had an “epiphany” and realized his life was a mess. He had become dependent upon alcohol and drugs to get him through a grueling schedule of travel and shows. He had to change...he had to do better. He wrote a song “I Saw the Light” that talks about his journey...

*Just like a blind man, I wandered along
Worries and fear I claimed for my own
Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.*

Williams biographer wrote “I Saw the Light” was the prayer of a backslider, who lives in hope of redemption.

Today we celebrate the Conversion of Saint Paul, another man who “Saw the Light”. Our Lesson from Acts commences with Saul, who would later be called Paul, heading on the Road to Damascus with arrest warrants for Christians. Saul was consumed with hate for anyone who believed in Jesus. He was making it his life’s goal to destroy the Church and silence the Name of Jesus and his message of hope. However, God had other plans for Saul.

As Saul approached Damascus he was knocked off his horse by a bright light. He heard a voice that said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul asked who it was and the voice answered, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” A prick was a sharp pointed stick farmers used to coax oxen to move so they could plow the field. Jesus is saying to Saul he needs to stop acting like a stubborn ox and listen to what he has to tell him.

Paul's dramatic conversion while he was on his way to Damascus was the epiphany...the striking appearance...that changed his life forever. The bright light that knocked him to the ground was the light of the Risen Jesus himself, who told him to stand up and stop making a fool out of himself. He would no longer be the angry person out to tear down the Church. Instead, God would put him to work building up the Church.

The immediate affect of Saul's first-encounter of the up close and personal kind with Jesus was blindness...he could not see. His friends had to take him by the hand and lead him into the city. While Saul was fasting and praying, God told a man named Ananias to go and find him, place his hand on him and restore his sight. Ananias was afraid because he knew Saul's reputation as a hater of the Church, but he went and healed him.

Paul's conversion is an epiphany...a striking appearance...that shows us God has the power to use everything and everyone to accomplish his purpose. He changed the angry heart of Saul the Church's spoiler into the faithful heart of Paul the Church builder and Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul's faced many struggles as he went about spreading the Good News about Jesus. He never gave up...his faith was firm. When we think about the struggles in our own lives we should try to remember the people who have been epiphanies for us and who have helped us through those struggles.

Not everyone is a fan of country-western music. Hank Williams left us a legacy in the powerful words of his Gospel song "I Saw the Light"...

*Just like a blind man, I wandered along
Worries and fear I claimed for my own
Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight
Praise the Lord, I saw the light.*

Saint Paul's life-changing conversion brought him out of spiritual darkness into the Light that is Christ. His feast day is a fitting way to conclude the Epiphany Season. What more can we possibly say but, Praise the Lord, we too have seen the Light!

