**TUESDAY JANUARY 25 – THIRD WEEK O.T. [C]**

**CONVERSION OF SAINT PAUL**

**But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.**

**The Apostle Paul is the one who, more than anyone else, has lived the command of Jesus the Lord who constituted him light of the people, light of every nations, missionary of his truth and of his grace. He has lived it not in a peaceful way, though, but among thousands of persecutions. Here is how He narrates his sorrowful vicissitudes in the Second Letter to Corinthians:** “**To my shame I say that we were too weak! But what anyone dares to boast of (I am speaking in foolishness) I also dare. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I am talking like an insane person.) I am still more, with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure. And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led to sin, and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus knows, he who is blessed forever, that I do not lie. At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus, in order to seize me, but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.” (2Cor 11, 21-33)**

**The greatest sorrow suffered by the Apostle Paul was not what the Jews or the Gentiles caused for him. The strongest sorrow was the fall from faith of those people he had led into the Gospel with great tiredness and sufferance. He went by, evangelized, attracted to Christ the Lord, proclaimed the true Gospel of Christ Jesus and after some time all of his work went up into flames. Nothing remained. And he always had to return to sow the true Gospel again, without never losing heart, going astray, falling from his great zeal. The Apostle Paul becomes thus true model of every Shepherd of Jesus the Lord in the Church of the living God. Every Shepherd must know that he sows the Gospel not on the way, not among stones, not among thorns, not on a good soil. He sows it on the sand of sea, instead. When it seems that it is going to bear some fruit, the savage wave of heresy and of falsity immediately comes to destroy all things. What does the Apostle do, then? He begins to sow the Gospel again in those hearts devastated by the many falsities and heresies, knowing that once again the savage wave would be back to devastate what he had sowed again today with great tiredness. Here is a strong warning to the Galatians who were gone over to a different Gospel:** “**I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by (the) grace (of Christ) for a different gospel (not that there is another). But there are some who are disturbing you and wish to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach (to you) a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one that you received, let that one be accursed! Am I now currying favor with human beings or God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.” (cf. Gal 1, 6-17) The Gospel of Paul is true since it is directly received from Jesus. Paul has really given his heart to the Scripture and, through it, the Scripture was made living, it has spoken, has manifested its divine richness, has unveiled all the powerful light enclosed in it.**

**Let us read the text of Mk 16,15-20**

**He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents (with their hands), and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs.)**

**The Apostle Paul is the gift of the Lord’s mercy not only to the entire world, but he is infinitively more the most sublime grace made to the Church. Through his zeal, his love, his passion for Christ Jesus, in him the Gospel was clothed with a new vigour, a new strength. Who is again the Apostle Paul? He is the one who living with the heart of the Father, the heart of Christ, the heart of the Holy Spirit in his heart brings these three hearts in the Word with his heart and the entire Word comes to life. With Paul’s heart poured in it, the Scripture speaks of man and of things, of time and of eternity, of truth and of falsity, of life and of death in an extremely divine way. Mother of God, help us give life to the Word and let every Apostle of Jesus be clothed with the same zeal as Paul.**