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The Gamest Fighter.

Next Monday (which terminates the Church Unity Octave) is the feast of the conversion of the gamest fighter the Church has ever known. His name was first Saul, later changed to Paul.

As a highly intelligent young Jew, Saul found his religion and his race extremely unpopular in the ancient pagan world in which he lived. There were two courses open to him: he could soften up on his inborn convictions; or he could hold them vigorously, and fight. He chose to fight.

First of all he opposed the new Christian sect that was splitting up his own people. Wasn't it trouble enough, he reasoned, to fight united against those pagan Greeks! Bungling, fanatical Christians he would help smash!

At the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen, there was Saul. In the thick of the great persecution at Jerusalem Saul "worked havoc" to the early Church. He forced his way into Christian homes, dragged Christian men and women into prisons. He terrorized them with force and fear.

To the High Priest at Jerusalem Saul hurried "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." He demanded authorization to oppose Christians in the North. He got the authorization.

With official letters in his pocket he tore on horseback up to the City of Damascus. On the way something strange happened to him, something that changed the entire direction of Saul's life.

As he rode a heavenly light struck him to the ground and he heard a kind masculine voice call to him: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goad!"

That was enough for Saul. No pussy-footing, half-way measures for him. He had been wrong with all the violence of his ardent soul. He would be right with the same force magnified and made Christlike. With characteristic suddenness he turns Christian-- saint to the core, apostle to the death. Even his name he changes from Saul to Paul.

Back to Jerusalem he travels, now the firebrand of Christ. Out of Jerusalem, by land and by sea he journeys, fighting intrigue and insurrection among Pagans and Jews. He preaches, he writes, he suffers, he fights. But note now this difference: as a Christian he never exerts physical violence on others. On the contrary, he suffers that violence himself.

According to his own testimony, bitter Jews scourge him five different times, with 39 lashes each time. Three times he is cruelly beaten with rods. Once he is stoned. Three times he is shipwrecked. Frequently he falls among robbers. Frequently he is in dangers with his own people, the Jews, and with the Pagans. Often, he says, he is in perils in the wilderness,--where probably he goes to pray and to "hide out!"

Nevertheless, through all opposition, he fights on in labor and painfulness, in watchings and hunger and thirst, in fasts often, in cold and nakedness. Near the end they put him in chains in Rome, then, finally, behead him.

Christianity meant so much to Paul that he would ride through fire and brimstone to bring it to others. When modern Catholics get Paul's spirit of zeal and self-sacrifice the ends of the Church Unity Octave will be realized in a day. Hurry that blessed day, Saint Paul!