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The Greatest Conversion.

Today is the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul -- favorite theme of artists, momentous fact in the history of the Church.

Paul was born shortly after Christ, in 3 A. D., at Tarsus in Cilicia, a famous literary center of the time. He was a Jew by birth but possessed Roman citizenship. This fact gives the simplest explanation of his double name, Saul (Greek, Saulos) and Paul (Latin, Paulus). Highly intelligent, he was well schooled in both Jewish and Greek thought.

First mentioned in Scripture as a young witness to the stoning of St. Stephen, he appears afterwards as a violent persecutor of the Church.

"Breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," Paul, yet a young man of 31, was one day on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus. Outside that city something happened.

"Suddenly a light from Heaven shined round about him.

"And falling on the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

"Who said: Who art thou, Lord? And he: I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.

"And he trembling and astonished, said: Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts IX).

After his baptism by Ananias in Damascus, Paul spent three years in the mountains near Damascus -- years of immediate revelations to Paul by Christ.

Then follows the most active, eventful missionary life of any Apostle of the Church. Paul himself describes it:

"Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes, save one.

"Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I was in the depth of the sea.

"In journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils from my own nation, in perils from the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils from false brethren.

"In labour and painfulness, in much watchings, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." (11 Cor. XI, 24-27).

On the 18th of July, 64 A.D., Nero caused the great fire of Rome, throwing the responsibility on the Christians. Paul was in Rome at the time and was put in chains and cast into prison. Tradition has it that he was executed on the 29th of June, 67 A.D., outside the City of Rome. Still preserved at the spot of his martyrdom are the pillars to which St. Paul was bound and the block of marble upon which he was beheaded. The name of the Church at the sacred place is St. Paul at the Three Fountains, so named because three fountains are said to have sprung forth at three spots where the severed head of the Saint struck the earth.

PRAYERS: Deceased - Jerry Meservey's father. Ill - Phil Quattran and Jim Gomez (both in the hospital with pneumonia); Bill Murray (recovery from appendectomy). A thanksgiving; three special intentions.