

**Homily – Friday of the Third Week of Easter
St. Paul Catholic School – April 19, 2024**

Our first reading today tells an important story. Who can tell me who is the main character in today's first reading? The story is known as Saint Paul's Conversion.

From the moment the first Christians went out to announce the Resurrection of Jesus, the persecutions against them began. These persecutions continue to this day, and they will go on until Jesus returns in the fullness of his glory. That is what Jesus himself announced. However, the Lord also warned us against judging and hating those who persecute us. **Who does Jesus command us to love?** Everyone, even those who hate us. The conversion of Saint Paul shows us a good reason for this teaching of Jesus.

Before his conversion, Paul persecuted Christians. He even approved the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr, killed by those who hated our faith. Paul wanted to destroy the Church. However, after his conversion he became a model missionary. To this day, we look to Paul as an example of what it means to announce Jesus. Very often, in Mass, we even hear from his letters. The Letters of St. Paul are part of the New Testament in the Bible. And there are many churches, like this one, named after him.

Saint Paul's change of heart was so radical that he dedicated the rest of his life to spread the good news about Jesus. His love for Jesus was much greater than his fear. After a long and fruitful missionary journey, he was beheaded in Rome. Imagine how much Paul felt loved by Jesus, so he loved God back

so passionately. Paul was no fool. He was even more than a great leader. He believed in the power of the Resurrection of Jesus and witnessed to it. Those who have an open heart to encounter the living Jesus, are called to be witnesses and empowered with seven supernatural gifts.

After the Resurrection, the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, who strengthens his witnesses with something much greater than superpowers. **Who knows what I'm talking about?** As you know, superpowers are not real, but the supernatural gifts, which empowered Saint Paul, are very real. They are called the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and they can also empower you to be faithful missionary disciples. These are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

Pope Francis extends this invitation: (quote) *“Together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, let us pray with Paul and say: ‘What are we to do, Lord?’ In asking that question, we already have an answer, because the first answer is prayer.”* (end of quote).

Participating in the Eucharist is the best form of prayer, which leads us to our sharing of the Bread of Life, our communion in the Body of Jesus. We grow in our relationship with Jesus as we celebrate Mass well. As Paul's life did not end with his execution, our life is also called to extend to eternity, through our witness of the Risen Jesus living within us and among us. **Do you want to live forever? Do you want to remain in Jesus?**

Let us ask Our Lady of Guadalupe to strengthen us through her tender protection of you, your families, and your school community.