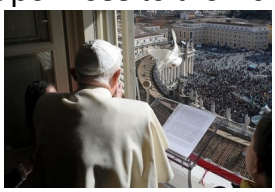
CONVERSION:
Openness to the illumination of Divine Grace



VATICAN CITY, 25 JAN 2009 (VIS)
The Holy Father dedicated his remarks before praying the Angelus to today's Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, and to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which also comes to a close today.

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Commenting on the reading from St. Mark in which Christ invites people to convert and believe in the Gospel, the Pope explained to the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square that in the case of St. Paul "some people prefer not to use the term conversion because, they say, he was already a believer, indeed a zealous Jew, and hence he did not move from non-faith to faith, from idols to God; nor did he have to abandon the Jewish faith in order to adhere to Christ. In fact, the experience of the Apostle can be a model for all true Christian conversion".

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"Saul converted because, thanks to the divine light, 'he believed in the Gospel'. His conversion, and ours, consists in this: in believing in
Jesus, dead and risen, and in opening oneself to the illumination of His divine grace. At that moment, Saul understood that his salvation depended not upon good works undertaken in accordance with the Law, but on the fact that Jesus died also for him - the persecutor - and was, and is, risen. This truth which, thanks to Baptism, illuminates the life of each Christian, completely changes the way we live". Trusting in Christ's power of forgiveness means "escaping from the quicksand of pride and sin, of lies and sadness, of selfishness and false security, to know and experience the richness of His love".



"The call to conversion - strengthened by St. Paul's own witness - rings out today at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is particularly important in the field of ecumenism. The Apostle shows us the right spiritual attitude in order to progress along the path of communion. 'Not that I have obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own'. Of course, we Christians have not yet attained the goal of full unity, but if we allow ourselves to be continually converted by the Lord Jesus we will surely reach it".