

- As we experience another weekend of humbling winter weather, we're being forced to slow down our lives – a welcome gift to many of us. When God allows weather like this, we can only accept it – for we cannot change it or dominate it. We cannot force our will upon it.
- On days like this, when we are humbled and forced to slow down, I love to ponder the lives of our saints for the example they provide in the midst of challenges and difficulties.
- The last week of January provides feast days for some of our greatest saints, such as St. John Bosco yesterday, St. Thomas Aquinas on January 28, my own patron St. Timothy on January 26, and good St. Paul on January 25.
- Normally, feast days commemorate the death of a particular saint. And certainly we do have a feast day that commemorates the death of St. Paul, but that occurs on June 29 – a feast day he shares with St. Peter.
- Because of his vital importance to the life and history of the Church, St. Paul gets two feast days rather than one, and his feast on January 25 is called the *Conversion of St. Paul*.
- And what a wonderful thing to celebrate! Through the conversion of St. Paul, Holy Mother Church gained Her most fearless and tireless preacher, a man who truly was willing to suffer for the Gospel and do so with great efficacy.
- Now many of the saints have remarkable conversion stories. Just looking around our church, we can find images of St. Augustine, St. Ignatius, and St. Edith Stein – all of whom had rather dramatic conversions to the Faith.
- Yet none of them really match up with St. Paul, whose conversion from being the early Church's greatest enemy into Her most zealous ambassador is really the prototype for all conversions.
- In his arrogance St. Paul believed he could destroy the Church founded by Christ, and he was doing a pretty good job of doing so until, in a single moment, the light of Christ shown upon him, converting his proud and murderous heart.
- Just as St. Paul was thrown to the ground – presumably knocked off his horse – so we, too, must be humbled in order to turn fully to God. We, too, must allow the scales of sin and faithlessness to fall from our eyes so that we might truly know God as He is.
- In a general way our first two readings speak to us today of the necessity of being humble. This is important because humility is the axis upon which every conversion turns. If we are not willing to be humbled, we will never be converted!
- True humility is nothing more than a genuine recognition of Truth: the truth about God and ourselves. The truth is that we are nothing without Christ. The truth is that we are sinners in need of a savior.
- The truth is that God is constantly extending His love and mercy toward us, but we often and quite stubbornly turn away from Him through our sinfulness. Yet humility helps us to know God and ourselves so that we might order rightly our relationship with God.
- Humility is the key that unlocks the door to God's mercy and grace. Humility makes us pleasing in God's eyes, and a humble and contrite heart our Lord will never spurn.
- On the contrary the vices of pride, arrogance, and boastfulness lead us to turn away from God's grace and mercy, making ourselves god in His place – just as satan tried to do when he and the other reprobate angels rejected God's plan for man's redemption and were cast out of Heaven.

- As we think about God and the mighty plan of salvation that He has for humanity, we must recognize that God's ways are not man's ways. Indeed, God's ways often stand in stark contradiction to the ways of our world.
- As we hear from St. Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, "God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong, and God chose the lowly and despised of the world . . . to reduce to nothing those who are something."
- God works through contradictions as He does in order to remind man of His omnipotence, in the hopes that man will humbly submit to His will, for it is only in humble submission to God's will that we can hope to spend eternity amongst the blessed in Heaven.
- In the Gospel we are given the Beatitudes today, and the word *beatitude* means *blessed*. Thus, the Beatitudes provide a road map of sorts to show us how to get to Heaven. This is because the Beatitudes require a willingness on our part to be humble, to be poor in spirit.
- The Beatitudes also enjoin us to suffer and allow ourselves to be persecuted. They encourage us to control our passions, and to be merciful, pure, and peaceable – all the things we must do to imitate Christ.
- So if we live the Beatitudes well, they actually prepare us for life in Heaven! This is good, for Heaven is our true home – not this world.
- You see, my brothers and sisters, as Christians we must never be so rooted in our earthly lives that we fail to put our hopes in Heaven. We will never be truly fulfilled in this world; this world will always leave us desiring more.
- Sadly, in our desire to live as fulfilling lives as possible, or as comfortable lives as possible, man will often go to great lengths and even commit sin.
- We see this especially in those who desire power and influence over others. Human history is full of examples of people who have trampled on the rights of others in order to secure power for themselves or to maintain what power they already have.
- Man frequently tries to conquer his fellow man by force, and when he's successful in doing so, it's often with disastrous results.
- Yet there are some things that can never be taken by force. Some things can only be accepted. This is true of God's grace and mercy. We can never take Heaven by force.
- God's grace and mercy, and ultimately His gift of eternal salvation, are things that we can only receive from our Lord. To gain Heaven – which should be the goal of all our lives – we must submit ourselves to the mighty power of God.
- And this requires that we be humble and live a life of Beatitude.
- Like good St. Paul and all the saints, may we always humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, so that in His generosity He may raise us up in holiness.
- And may the beatitudes become for us a way of life that leads us to the life amongst the blessed in Heaven.
- St. Paul, pray for us!