

Saints *Alive!*

A Periodic Newsletter of Emmaus Journey

Issue
20

A Reason for the Seasons—Conversion

By Rich Cleveland

Each liturgical season of the year, each feast day celebrated, provide a time to reflect and pray, and to receive the grace to begin afresh in our relationship with Jesus; Lent and Easter are the longest and most profound Liturgical Seasons of reflection

This year for the first time since 1945, Ash Wednesday, the day that most of us consider as the beginning of the season of Lent, fell on Valentine's Day, and Easter on April Fools' Day. To my knowledge there is no correlation between Ash Wednesday and Valentine Day as celebrations, but falling as they do on the same day, the "red heart" image so connected to Valentine's Day perhaps could remind us of the love connection God has with his Church, through Jesus. In this regard it could also remind us of the images for the *Divine Mercy of Jesus*, and the *Sacred Heart of Jesus*; love flowing from Jesus' heart to us. Saint Josemaría Escrivá explains that "when we talk about the heart of Jesus, we stress the certainty of God's love and the truth of his commitment to us."¹

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37) is the only reasonable response to the Father's love. We are also reminded by Saint Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 that it is *the love of Christ* which motivates us to live no longer for ourselves but for him who for our sake died and gave himself for us. The season of Lent is a time of reflection, remembering that it is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that delivers from all that enslaves us. Salvation given from a heart of love should invoke a response of love.

We are fortunate to be members of the Church which recalls the life of Christ throughout the liturgical calendar year. Each liturgical season of the year, each feast day celebrated, provide a time to reflect and pray, and to receive the grace to begin afresh in our relationship with Jesus; Lent and Easter are the longest and most profound Liturgical Seasons of reflection. All of this is consistent with the Catholic understanding

of *conversion* as not merely being a one-time event of turning to the Lord for salvation, but rather a lifelong continual, ongoing process of conversion, a continual turning towards Jesus. Pope Benedict XVI expanded on this truth in a homily given in 2009, "To be converted means, also for each one of us, to believe that Jesus 'has given himself for me', dying on the Cross (cf. Galatians 2:20) and, risen, lives with me and in me. Entrusting myself to the power of his forgiveness, letting myself be taken by the hand, I can come out of the quicksands of pride and sin, of deceit and sadness, of selfishness and of every false security, to know and live the richness of his love."²

The difficulty many of us experience is realizing and acknowledging that we still need to be pulled out of the quicksand, after all, some of us have been committed Catholic Christians for years—consequently we often go through these seasons and celebrations anaesthetized by the routineness of our participation. Cardinal Newman reminds us, "To the end of the longest life you are still a beginner. What Christ asks of you is not sinlessness but diligence"³—diligence to participate in the life of the parish, its seasons and celebrations, its Sacraments of reconciliation and grace, its practice of Scripture reading and prayer—a diligence, the practice of which enables us to periodically recognize that we need to once again be converted.

Additionally, because sin is deadening, it is not unusual to let little sinful habits, as well as incidences of more serious sin to live in our lives disguised and accepted as normalcy. But that "normalcy" is not the life Jesus died to obtain for us. The Holy Spirit is ever alive and active in our lives calling to us, working in us, to lead us out of that false normalcy. Often our life is so busy, so taken

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Emmaus Journey Mission Statement

Emmaus Journey is a lay Catholic evangelization and discipleship ministry which partners with parishes, small groups and individuals to facilitate a personal encounter with and conversion to Christ, thereby forming missionary disciples actively living for Jesus.

Emmaus Journey's goals are:

- To help enable non-practicing Catholics, occasional Catholics, and nominal Catholics experience conversion to Christ, transformation in Christ, and mobilization for Christ as Catholic disciples.
- To encourage Catholics to embrace Jesus' call to advance the Gospel and his Kingdom by becoming laborers who live and disciple others from among the nonreligious.
- To help mature and gifted Catholics discover a particular call to participate more fully in the task of evangelization.
- To indirectly serve Catholic parishes' evangelization efforts through small-group materials, evangelization and discipleship resources, seminars, ministry events, and messages that move them forward in their efforts to make Christ known, and to nurture mature Catholic disciples who can help others experience conversion, transformation, and mobilization for Christ.



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From the Heart

By Henry Abeyta

As President of Emmaus Journey, I am pleased to reinstitute *Saints Alive!* with a plan to produce three more issues in 2018. We need your help though, in evaluating what kind of information is most valuable to you. As a small non-profit we must be mindful to strategically deploy our resources in areas that meet a need and are impactful. My prayer is that this publication will contribute to your spiritual growth, on-going conversion, and encouragement to go deeper with Sacred Scripture. Also, that you will share it with your friends

This issue's focus during these seasons of Lent and Easter is on conversion. The conversion of Saul on the road to Damascus should inspire us no matter where we currently stand in our Christian life. Saul was a man, passionate, scholarly, protective of strict religious norms, who persecuted "this Way," a fledgling group founded on the belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Needless to say, Saul believed otherwise and took active steps imprisoning them, and consenting to having these supposed heretics put to death. He set out on a journey to imprison and snuff out this spark of rebellion. But Jesus revealed himself to Saul on that road to Damascus, and it entirely turned Saul's life around, so much so that his name was changed to Paul, the Saint whose feast we recently celebrated. So now consider, what does conversion constitute for you and me? Is it an initial belief in Jesus as the person who is God among us, showing the way, as with Paul, or does it involve making on-going decisions to more actively live our life as a disciple of Jesus? Though we may not be a murderer like Saul, does our conversion make us passionate to live as Jesus leads us, no matter where it may take us?

How do we respond to Jesus' call? Do we respond like Paul, "Who are you, sir?" and "What shall I do, sir?" When called to interact with someone who is antagonistic and threatening, do we avoid them and rationalize, or do we respond like Ananias who overcame his reluctance and said "Saul, my brother, regain your sight ... Now, why delay? Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling upon his name." (Acts 22:3-16, Lectionary 519)

This season of Lent and the upcoming Easter season are opportunities for each of us to renew our baptismal vows, to examine ourselves, to listen to Jesus voice of direction, to receive a washing away of our sins as we set out without delay to follow Jesus and to be his hands and feet in our world today. We can take heart from the conversion of Saul, to Paul — the person who Jesus called to a radically new purpose beyond Saul's previous understanding, Saint Paul whose whole life was set on a dramatically different path by his encounter with Jesus. He went from murderer, to an apostle to the gentiles whose inspired writings impact us to this day. From a man with "blood on his hands" to a person sold out and passionate about carrying the Gospel message to all through the experiences of his own life. May we each respond to Jesus' call as Paul did, completely turning over our lives to the author and creator of all life and purpose.

In this issue, we also reintroduce and update the ministry of Abe and Liz Chavez, two disciples of our Lord who desire to see many come to Christ and grow in their faith and walk and follow the person of Jesus.

I pray for God's rich blessings on you and your families! We also invite you to send us feedback on this publication, so we can better serve you.



Henry Abeyta became Director of Emmaus Journey in January 2012. With its establishment as a tax exempt 501c(3) organization in 2014, Henry has served as its President. He and Darlene are the parents of two sons and two grandsons. Henry retired from Sandia National Laboratories where he worked for 30 years and in the latter part of his career received significant experience in the international arena. He and Darlene are long-time members of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish.

Saints: The Extraordinary Lives of Ordinary People

Saint Paul

St. Paul, was born in the city of Tarsus, a Roman city, thereby giving him Roman citizenship and the Roman name Paul. Under Jewish law he was circumcised, was instructed in the Mosaic Law and was given the Hebrew name Saul. Saul proved to be an excellent student and, later, as a Pharisee was respected for his great intellect and zeal for the Jewish faith and traditions. Because of Saul's great zeal for Jewish law and traditions, he was very upset about his Jewish brethren who were following the New Way, as Christianity was first called. So, thinking that he was serving God, Saul became the worst enemy of Christians. He hunted them down and dragged them out of their homes, imprisoning them and even having them killed.

Saul's conversion occurred when he was on his way to the city of Damascus where he planned to continue his persecution of the Christians. On the way to the city he was struck blind

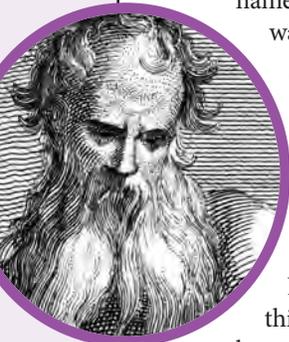
*On his journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He said, "Who are you, sir?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, for they heard the voice but could see no one. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. For three days he was unable to see, and he neither ate nor drank.*¹

During his stay in Damascus Saul's eyes were opened through a cure by the disciple Ananias, he was baptized and his conversion occurred as Paul accepted the mission to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*So Ananias went and entered the house; laying his hands on him, he said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy Spirit." Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized, and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength.*²

¹ Acts: 9, 3-9 (NABRE)

² Acts: 9, 17-19 (NABRE)



The Chavezes: A Service-Oriented Duo

Abe and Liz Chavez, driven by a passion to know Christ and to make him known, have embraced the Christian mandate of being Christ's witnesses. Though lifelong Catholics, it was in their collegiate years that Christ became the central focus of their lives, and they began their lifelong love affair with Jesus. After college, as Abe pursued his career as project engineer in the telecommunications industry and Liz pursued her calling as wife and mother, they continued to grow in their relationship with Christ and as his disciples.

In 1995, after much prayer and counsel, Abe resigned his position as project engineer to enter into full-time lay ministry. They sought to actively be involved in various ministry and leadership roles at Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary Parish in Albuquerque, NM, but now spend more time personally helping people grow in their love and commitment to Christ.

Recognizing that evangelization is the foremost mission and duty of all the baptized, Abe and Liz became increasingly involved in this faith-inspired process of witnessing and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. They became leaders in the ACTS (Adoration, Community, Theology, Service) retreat ministry at their parish. There they encountered many men and women who were searching for a closer relationship with Christ. They lead the follow-up sessions of these retreats with Sacred Scriptures as the focus of the formation process. These sessions lead to new Small Christian Community (SCC) faith-sharing groups. God has blessed their efforts and enabled them to have an expanding ministry in the lives of many. Their other ministries include leading a Youth Choir and leading the Marriage Preparation ministry which they love because it provides contact with young Catholics in their parish.

It is on their hearts that disciples and disciple makers surface from these ministry settings. In such settings, they can encourage, model, and challenge participants to embrace Christ and his call to Kingdom living. They share the Emmaus Journey objectives of inviting people to experience conversion to Christ, transformation in Christ, and mobilization for Christ as Catholic disciples. Matthew 28:19 (NAB)¹⁹ *Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit,*²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

The Chavezes would be the first to tell you that they are simply ordinary Catholics striving to be faithful disciples. We would agree, and would suggest that ordinary Catholics trying to be faithful disciples can have an extraordinary impact.



Tools You Can Use

The Words of the Risen Christ

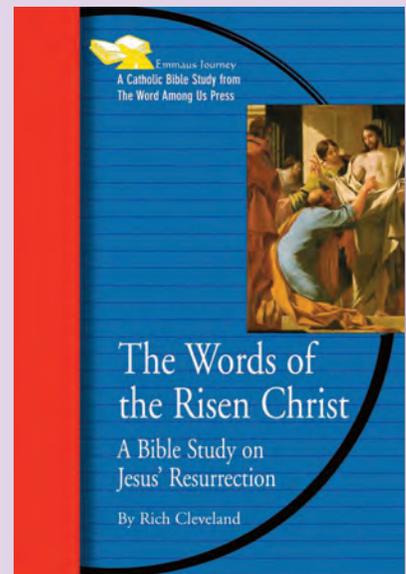
Jesus' final words after His resurrection, such as "Go make disciples" and "Peace be with you," set the tone for each of the eight sessions of this Bible study. They help participants explore themes such as community, reconciliation, the power of the Holy Spirit and the call to evangelization.

The Words of the Risen Christ will enable you as an individual or in a small group setting to enter into the hearts and minds of the disciples as they joyfully discover that Jesus is not dead but has risen.

This Bible study consists of eight enlightening sessions. Each session features:

- Scripture Text
- A Commentary
- A Series of Reflective Questions
- A Prayer
- A Call to Action

This Bible study was written as a follow-up study to *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. Participants of this study will resonate with the disciples as they come to grips with their disappointments and shortcomings. And they will also exult with these same disciples when they experience Jesus' love, forgiveness, and companionship.



A Reason for the Seasons—Conversion continued from front page

up with activities and things, that we can't hear because we aren't really listening. Jesus gave us the Sabbath day of rest, so that at least one day in seven we could be less preoccupied, and listen. The Church recognizes that contemplating the life of Jesus is necessary for us to obtain, and maintain, a life of relationship with Him. The first step of an authentic relationship with Jesus is to listen, "For in truth we are not called once only, but many times; all through our life Christ is calling us. He called us first in Baptism; but afterwards also; whether we obey His voice or not, He graciously calls us still. ... He calls us again and again, in order to justify us again, and again—and again and again, and more and more, to sanctify and glorify us."⁴

This is the hope of salvation, the joy of conversion, that "entrusting myself to the power of his forgiveness, letting myself be taken by the hand, I can come out of the quicksands of pride and sin, of deceit and sadness, of selfishness and of every false security, to know and live the richness of his love." What a wonderful way to describe one's life; *I am living in the richness of his love.*

A prisoner was released from false imprisonment after serving twenty years for a crime he didn't commit. One can only imagine the joy he and his family experienced to have his supposed guilt wiped clean, his good name restored, to be united once again with his family, and to walk as a free man.

What we would not be able to imagine would be his refusal to accept release and restoration,—that would be beyond comprehension. Yet many of us foolishly refuse to accept restoration in exchange for estrangement. We refuse the joy of forgiveness in exchange for the weight of guilt. And we refuse the freedom and power of life in Christ in exchange for enslavement to sinful habits. Christ sets us free and Lent calls us to his life of freedom, liberty, and release. Let us take time to listen, to pray for significant ongoing conversion within, and that God would enable us to fully grasp the meaning of his liberating sacrifice on our behalf so that we can enjoy living in a restored relationship with him. Let us engage in this Lent, and each Season of the year, with the desire to continually experience greater conversion to Christ.

Rich Cleveland is the founder of Emmaus Journey and was its first Director. He and his wife continue to serve Emmaus Journey, and live in Colorado Springs, Colo.

1. *Handbook of Prayers*, from "Finding Peace in the Heart of Christ," by Saint Josemaría Escrivá.
2. Angelus, 25 January 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI, from w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/.../hf_ben-xvi_ang_20090125.html
3. From *The Heart of Newman*, by John Henry Newman, page 203
4. *Ibid*, page 212