

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael Basque

30 April 2020

First, a few things you should know:

- The latest Sunday Liturgy video has been completed and should be up on the Parish website soon. Thank-you again to all those who have assisted me in this project. I hope it helps those of you who watch it.
- Everyone at the Rectory is healthy and as happy as we can be under the circumstances. Thank-you to all those who have called to check up on us.

When most people hear the word “conversion” in a religious context, they think of a dramatic life-changing event as when Paul encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, a voice told St. Augustine “take and read” or Thomas Merton suddenly realized God’s presence. Although these types of experiences have happened throughout history, it is important to recall they are only the first step on a long journey towards God. True conversion involves a number of elements which guide its development. It also does not always unfold in an orderly fashion and often includes wrong turn and backtracking.

In today’s First Reading, Philip encounters an Ethiopian official returning home from Jerusalem and guides his conversion to Christianity. The official was likely Jewish because he had worshipped in Jerusalem and had a copy of the Book of Isaiah in his possession. Such details highlight the fact conversions are rooted in the lived situation of people. Philip’s going up to the chariot stresses the fact conversion begins with a personal encounter with someone connected to God. By his response to Philip’s question about understanding the Isaiah text, the official showed his desire to learn more about his faith and the world around him. Philip’s explanation of the text and proclamation of the good news about Jesus moved the official’s faith tradition (Judaism) and life experience in a new direction. Only after this new understanding could be articulated, the official stating Jesus was the Son of God, would his “conversion” be ratified through the Baptism administered by Philip. Since it is unlikely the story contained all the details of what was said between Philip and the official, the conversion process was likely not as smooth as reported. Yet, the account highlights how conversion involves the slow movement from a position of confusion and/or lack of knowledge to a new and clearer understanding which is eventually confirmed by an outward sign and new mission in life. It is likely the official carried what he learned from Philip back to Ethiopia and shared it with anyone who would listen to him.

During this Covid-19 pandemic, we are undergoing a “conversion” process. The world in which we lived back in January or February will never return. Even if we are able to go back to our jobs, be part of a huge crowd at a sporting event and travel wherever we want, things will not be the same because we have changed. The way we look at disease, how public services are provided, the bonds between people and many other issues will be different. This process of “conversion” will begin with our life situation now. We are more conscious of how vulnerable we are to dangers ignored in the past and the uncertainties of the future. Through encounters with others, we are reminded we can learn from one another and do not have to be alone. Like the

official, we are confused by things we don't understand but this may provide us with a learning opportunity. Others can help us take the traditions of our past (like coming together during a crisis) and our present situation (this pandemic) and point us in a new direction (building a better country and world after all this is over). Only when we are able to articulate how our thinking has changed can we ratify it through our actions.

With their experiences of "conversion" Catholics and other people of faith may be able to provide some help during this process. They have traditions which recall the collected wisdom of the past, experiences rooted in the world as it is today and a divinely revealed plan for the future which is hope-filled. Since they know conversion is a journey, they accept they are not yet where they want to be. They recognize there will likely be a few wrong turns along the way. Yet, they also know there is a destination they can reach if they keep going.

There will be a post-Covid-19 world. When we arrive there it will be different from what we have experienced in the past. But, will our thinking undergo a "conversion" so we can thrive there.