

Why Do You Persecute Me?

Acts of the Apostles 9:1-31

What We Found

Six weeks of waiting ended in a persecutor's paperwork. Saul's arrest warrants named the people he was hunting: "any belonging to the Way" (9:2). The first appearance of the name the movement would carry is the name on the cover of this study, and it confesses what Christianity is: not a philosophy held but a road walked, after the One who said "I am the way" (John 14:6). Watch for the name; Luke is not finished with it.

On that road, the doubled call of the patriarchs, "Saul, Saul," like Abraham, Abraham and Moses, Moses, came from the last voice Saul's theology allowed: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Saul, so far as we know, had never met Jesus; he struck at Christians. The pronoun *me* carries the whole doctrine of the Mystical Body: the Church so united to Christ that her wounds are His. St. Augustine called it the *totus Christus*, the whole Christ, Head and members, and St. Joan of Arc said it in one sentence the Catechism preserves: about Jesus Christ and the Church, "I simply know they are just one thing" (CCC 795).

Then three days blind and fasting, a personal echo of the sign of Jonah, and the Lord's strange economy: rather than finish the conversion Himself on the road, Christ sent Ananias, an ordinary disciple whose first word to the persecutor was "Brother," and through whose hands came sight, the Holy Spirit, and baptism that washed his sins away (9:17-18; 22:16). Even the apostle called directly by heaven received grace the way Christ ordinarily gives it: through the Church. And when Jerusalem was too afraid to receive him, Barnabas staked his own name to vouch for the convert nobody trusted. The chapter that opened with murder in the air closed with the church in peace, multiplied, because God did not merely stop His enemy. He hired him.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Augustine of Hippo, Expositions of the Psalms and Sermons on the Conversion of St. Paul (5th century)

St. Augustine never tired of the pronoun. The Head was in heaven, untouchable, yet He cried "why do you persecute me?" because the Head cries out for His members, as the tongue says "you are stepping on me" when the foot is crushed. Christ and His Church are the whole Christ, and whoever strikes the least believer strikes Him.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom, Panegyrics on St. Paul (4th century)

Chrysostom marvels that grace took the Church's most violent enemy at the peak of his fury and made of him her most tireless servant. The wolf was turned into more than a shepherd: into a man who counted chains as trophies. No sinner may despair after Damascus, and no saint may boast.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Bede the Venerable, Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (8th century)

St. Bede lingers on the Lord's strange economy: Christ could have taught Saul everything on the road, yet He sent him into the city to receive the word, the Spirit, and baptism through Ananias. The Lord so honors the ministry of His Church that even one called by a voice from heaven is perfected through the hands of a fellow

servant, that the proud might learn that no one is Christian alone.

Live It This Week

Keep praying for your Saul from last week, by name, daily; you now know what those prayers can purchase. Then add the two roles this chapter modeled. Be an Ananias once: one concrete act of welcome toward someone you have feared, resented, or avoided, beginning, if you can manage it, with the word brother or sister. And be a Barnabas once: one act of vouching, publicly including, introducing, or standing beside someone who is new, returning, or distrusted. Do both quietly. The hinge moments of Church history run through people whose names almost nobody remembers, and whose obedience God never forgets.

Memory Verse

"But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.'" (Acts 9:15)

Before Next Session

Read Acts 9:32 through the end of chapter 11, once. Peter takes a journey, sees something on a rooftop that shocks him, and a door swings open that will never close again.

Catechism References

CCC 787-789, 795 (the Body of Christ, the whole Christ) · CCC 1263 (baptism washes away all sins)