

One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.

Readings: Acts 9:1-20 Conversion/vocation of Paul and Jn 6:52-59: Final Discourse on Bread of Life

The starring character of English writer and philosopher Gilbert K. Chesterton's first book wrote a book *The Innocence of Father Brown*. Fr. Brown is a priest-turned-detective who combines scientific observation with spirituality. Father Brown explains to another priest **how things can change based on perspective**. He tells his brother priest this: "One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak." He wanted to explain the value of humility. Looking down on the world from a lofty height makes things appear small, but when we are down in the valley looking up, we have a much better grasp of what we're seeing."

The persecutor Saul believed that those who followed "the Way" of Jesus "were a heretical sect of Judaism worthy of being punished for their false doctrines." Today's reading reveals how Saul was helped to move from seeing things from the peak of the Mosaic Law and by falling to the ground and by listening to a voice and Ananias, he began to see things from the valley. He was humbled and learned to see things from the perspective of the crucified Messiah. His transformation (vocation) is a **U-turn** of his convictions and biases.

Unrestrained convictions have led to the loss of lives. They still do today. Biases against some groups or individuals can make us blind to the fact that they too are loved by God. "A bias is a distortion to intellectual development." Biases are a bloc to charity. People are fixed in immovable categories because of biases. Biases may result from "unconscious motivation," rooted in the way people have been brought up to look down upon others. Biases can further be rooted in "individual egoism, and there is the more powerful and blinder bias of group egoism." Egoism seeks personal or group or ethnic advantage at the expense of others. We need to fall down from our biases, to change our perspective. **Make a U-turn.**

Conversion challenges and roots out deep-seated habits or biases. e.g., Zacchaeus, Samaritan woman. Indeed, at the heart of Christianity is the transformation of identity. Saul changed from a persecutor to become the missionary *par excellence*. He could no longer draw the line of those to be killed or not. All deserved to live. He is later given a new name: Paul: small, humble. As if to say, in Christ, we become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17)... "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20

In Christ, we are entrusted with a new heart of flesh and a new spirit. Emmanuel Katongole relates the story of a boy who, during the killings in Rwanda, "fled to the bush with Tutsis. After two or three weeks they pointed out to him that he was Hutu and did not have to die. He left the [swamps] and was not attacked. But he had spent so much time with Tutsis that he was mixed up. *He was confused*. He no longer knew how to draw the 'proper line' between the two ethnic groups."¹ That boy is what Christian mission is about. It is about embracing the way of Jesus. It is the way of brotherhood. It is the *Ujaama way*.

Biases must be challenged in order to follow the way of Jesus. While blind spots and biases often form some part of the psyche, the "way" of Jesus includes the rich and the poor, the persecuted and the despised, the elite and the low class. The "way" of Jesus allows no significance to biases.

¹ Katongole, *Mirror to the Church*, 156.

Conversion leads to the building of the body! “The heavenly question why Saul is persecuting “me” equates persecution of believers in Jesus to persecution of the Lord (the risen Jesus) himself. Paul’s experience that persecuting particular Christians is equivalent to persecuting the risen Jesus Christ himself probably contributes to Paul’s later awareness and teaching that Christians are members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31). What one does to individual members of the Body affects the corporate body of Christ, head and members. You cannot pretend to be a Christian alone, unconnected to others, without loving them.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. [1Cor 13:1-13]

Just remember that Mary did not likely speak many languages ... she had love!

Friends, what do we learn from Ananias as we bid farewell to our friends and colleagues. Mission of Ananias – directed to look for Saul of Tarsus. Ananias hesitates because **he knows** that Saul is arresting believers. Sometimes we are sent to places or to people we would not want to go or to meet or people who do not want to see us. Yet, we have to listen attentively: **where does God want us?** the Lord said to Ananias, *"Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and children of Israel, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name."*

As you go forward, do not only preach to the choir, to those who share your religious convictions. Learn to dialogue with culture, develop a culture of encounter! *Go out to the whole world and tell the Good News.* This does not exclude any particular region and may you break the walls that can develop around your hearts! Let everyone have a space. Is there someone you wished you opened up to?

And Friends, to have space for others, we need to eat the body and blood of Christ. In our Gospel, the long discourse on the bread of life is coming to its end. What is clear is that there is a “rich understanding of Jesus as the life-giving Bread” given by the father in a way that recalls, even as it fulfils and greatly surpasses, the gift of the manna to Israel.” Unlike the manna, what Jesus offers requires faith that, first of all, sees in his human person One come down from heaven,” the revelation of the unseen Father, but, which, beyond incarnation, is prepared to see that revelation extending into his self-sacrificing death upon the cross. Communion with the flesh and blood of Jesus involves readiness to self-sacrificing love for the world. “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (Jn 13:34)

Conclusion:

- One sees great things from the valley ...
- Break down your biases ... make a U-Turn ... Build-up the Body ...
- Develop a culture of encounter ... the Eucharist requires faith in the one who came down and it has ethical implications: self-sacrificing love.

May God bless you and keep you!

May God let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you!

May God grant you peace! May you carry HEKIMA in your heart! God, thanks for this Academic Year!

Marcel Uwineza, SJ // HUC Principal