The Conversion of St. Paul and the Mission of Marist School

January 25, 2023

Make no mistake about it. Before his conversion, Saul was an enemy of the Church, someone to be feared, a force to contend with, and a deadly serious adversary. He was on the way to Damascus to capture and take the Christians there prisoners when he was blinded by the Light who is Christ. Something extraordinary happened to him. He heard a voice, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" "Who are you," asks Saul." "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."

This event turned his life around. The great persecutor went on to become a great evangelizer, St. Paul, who would write, "Woe is me if I do not evangelize if I do not bring others to Christ."

How did he do that? We know that he was a tent maker. He worked, but his work was a means to an end. For him, making tents brought him into contact with people who were non-believers, skeptics, and committed pagans with whom he could engage in conversation about Jesus. He made his work serve his mission to make Jesus known among the Gentiles and to bring the Light of Christ to the nations outside Judaism.

We want our students at Marist to become St. Paul's. We want them to take his approach and realize that everything they learn and eventually do serves a greater purpose: to bring people to Christ. How are they to do that?

Let me give you one example of how it could be done. In the 1940s, there were a group of writers known as the inklings. J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Charles Williams met at a London pub to discuss their literature and critique each other's works. They wanted to write literature that would evangelize the mind of their readers, many of whom were no longer believers. You see that thinking in Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In both of these works, there are no overt references to Christian symbolism, but the themes in these stories are profoundly Christian and scriptural. These men were carrying on the tradition of St. Paul: bringing the Light of Christ to the nations. They understood their mission in life was to be something more than only living for what we here in the States call "the American dream" or living "the good life."

Through various ways and primarily through our extensive retreat programs here at Marist, we intend that our students, too, will become blinded by the Light who is Christ. Whether as writers, artists, engineers, lawyers, businesspeople, teachers, or athletes, we want them to graduate and be like St. Paul. We want them to see that their work and careers will allow them to come into contact with many people who will be agnostics, atheists, and lapsed Catholics. All of them have been blinded by other lights such as fame, money, success, power, status, and the like. They don't see there is more to life beyond this one. It will be the mission of Marist students to open the eyes of these skeptics and non-believers so that Christ our Light becomes their Light.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.