



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



The Story of Paul

By Prior Paul Kidner, OSB

The story of Paul's experience of God on the road to Damascus is one of the most dramatic scenes in the New Testament. It transformed him from persecution of those newly converted to Christianity to a strong and enduring commitment to Christ. It is no accident that this time of the year is chosen for the week of special prayer for Christian Unity; the week January 18 - 25 is selected because it culminates in the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, who was God's instrument for proclaiming that salvation was meant for all people, not just those of a chosen race.

Today's gospel, which is a supplement to the end of the gospel of Mark, shows that being commissioned by the risen Lord brings us a share in his extraordinary powers. The charismatic gifts described here are manifestations of God's presence among his people -- they will cast out devils, they will have the gift of tongues, they will be unharmed by snakes or poison, they will lay their hands on the sick who will recover.

Paul's experience of the Lord on the road to Damascus was his commissioning. Everything that Paul says and does from this time onwards is permeated by the conviction that he is loved by Christ. And in that knowledge of being loved by Christ, Paul thought of himself as possessing life, possessing the kingdom promised by God. But this is God's gift, God's grace: "By God's grace, I am what I am." "Now not I, but Christ lives in me." It was this conviction that enabled Paul to show us, better than any other writer, what man really is, in what our nobility consists and what we are capable of. Although our Damascus Road experience may not be as staggering as was Paul's, may we pray for that same conviction that he had that we are loved by Christ, and allow it to transform our lives.