

Conversion to Jesus Christ

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ~ Ezekiel 36:26

THROUGHOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT men and women who encountered Jesus were profoundly changed. “And a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I will; be clean.’ And immediately the leprosy left him” (Mk 1:40-42).

There was a paralytic whose friends let him down through the roof (see Mk 2:1-12). Jesus saw their faith and said to the man, “My son, your sins are forgiven” (Mk 2:5). This was revolutionary and seemed blasphemous to many, since only God can forgive sins. Yet Jesus made his mission very clear: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mk 2:17).

There was the woman of Samaria (the land of the despised outcasts as far as the Jews were concerned), whom Jesus engaged in conversation, (itself an extremely unusual behavior). Jesus made it very clear that he knew the condition of her soul (she was living with a man who was not her husband). As well, he revealed that he is the Messiah, the One promised by the Father. “The woman said to him, ‘I know that Messiah is coming ... when he comes, he will show us all things.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I who speak to you am he.’ ... So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, ‘Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?’ They went out of the city and were coming to him” (Jn 4:25-30).

There was the woman caught in adultery, who was saved from certain physical death by stoning and from eternal death because of her sin. “Jesus

looked up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again’” (Jn 8:10-11).

There was the man blind from birth who received sight from Jesus after washing clay from his eyes (see Jn 9:1-15). As well, one of the thieves who were crucified next to Jesus virtually “stole” Heaven

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The centurion glorifies God, by James Tissot, 1856-1902

in the eleventh hour of his life. “One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’ But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.’ And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.’ And he said

to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’” (Lk 23:39-43).

It is very simple to come to Jesus today. He is always near to those who call on him. In fact, he is standing at the door of each person’s heart: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rv 3:20). One of the best ways to respond to the invitation of Christ is this ancient prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (see Lk 18:13). By this prayer, the human heart is opened to repentance from sin and to commitment to follow Jesus in all things. As well, every Christian is called to a continual renewal of that initial conversion, frequently praying that prayer and going deeper into the life of Christ.

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