



One of the readings from the lectionary for the month of May tells of a very significant event that occurred when Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee from Jerusalem, and his companions, were heading towards Damascus. The event is given in Acts 9: 1 – 19 but is mentioned again in Acts 22: 6 – 21 and Acts 26: 12 – 18. There are further references to the event also in the New Testament. It seems that Saul had obtained letters from the high priest which authorized him to arrest any followers of Jesus Christ. He had already been very active and successful in this process. But as Saul and his group travelled to Damascus, suddenly there was a blinding light which caused the whole party to stop and to fall to the ground.

Saul heard a voice saying, Acts 9: 4, *“Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?”* Saul’s response, believing the voice to have been divine, asked, *“Who are you Lord?”* The response must have been very startling, *“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”* Saul is then told to go to Damascus, (although he is now unable to see), and to meet Ananias. Ananias was advised, in a dream, that Saul would visit, and although Ananias was uneasy about that, God advised him that Saul, *“Is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.”* The visit goes well, Saul’s sight is restored and he received the Holy Spirit and was baptized. He was also given advice about the new direction his life would now take.

The term, “Damascus Road Experience”, is still used today to describe a conversion which is dramatic and startling. Some people receive Christ in such a life changing, instantaneous experience, while others describe their conversion as a more gradual process and an understanding of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. When God touches our hearts, our response can be, “Lord, may your will be done and may you use me to do it.” Saul’s dramatic conversion experience was the beginning of a new and incredibly different journey. Perhaps it illustrates also that a person’s past is less important than a person’s future. Paul received the Holy Spirit, along with the truth of the gospel, so he could share it with others. He could not have achieved his remarkable accomplishments in his own strength. He was empowered by God. How about you?