



Foundations of Christian Life: Permanent Conversion

Introduction:

There are four goals that the proclamation of the Kerygma hopes to achieve in the lives of those who hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Each goal is part of the process of forming a New Life in Christ and each is necessary to embrace Jesus fully. However, even though we can experience each goal as part of the process, we never stop practicing that goal and persevering in living out that goal in our lives. The experience of each goal is a beginning and must become a permanent attitude as part of our Christian life. The four goals are:

1. **An attitude of permanent conversion:** We recognize that we must continue to always grow closer to Jesus in our lives. There is always room to improve in our relationship with God.
2. **A recognition of Jesus as Savior:** Connected to our need to always grow in our relationship with Jesus is the recognition of our need of a Savior in our lives. We cannot live our New Life without Jesus. Jesus told his disciples, "Whoever remains in me and I in him will be much fruit, because without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).
3. **A commitment that Jesus is Lord of our life:** Because we are totally dependent on the Lord, we must make Jesus the center of our life, where we continue to entrust all aspects of our life to his power.
4. **An openness to the Holy Spirit:** When we entrust our lives to Jesus, we must also keep ourselves aware of the Holy Spirit working in front of us and through us.

Permanent Conversion:

At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins his ministry by expressing the first response to the proclamation of the Gospel, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Because of the priority Jesus gives to this requirement, conversion should become a constant and ongoing attitude in our life. Conversion takes place in cooperation with God because only the Holy Spirit can change our hearts and make us a new creation. In conversion, it is God who changes us, but we must accept and invite him to do so. As St. Augustine states in one of his homilies, "He who created us without our help will not save us without our consent" (*Sermo* 169).

In Greek, there are two words for conversion: "*metanoia*" (literally, to turn the mind) and "*epistepho*" (literally, to turn upon, as an about-face). In one of Peter's kerygmatic homilies, he uses both terms, "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19). It could be translated, "Change your mind, therefore, and be turned around." Peter is telling us that our conversion requires both an internal change and exterior change. If we only change interiorly without changing our actions, we become hypocritical. If we change our actions without an interior change, our true intentions will become apparent over time.

In a Christian context, conversion is always turning away from something in order to turn towards Jesus. In the Christian life, we are called to recognize our errors, be willing to make a U-turn, and start going the correct direction towards Jesus. When we recognize that we are not just leaving things behind, but rather going toward something or someone better, our conversion will be more lasting. When we see Jesus in front of us, as opposed to having our back turned away from him, we can constantly move closer to Him. In other words, conversion is not just about avoiding sin, but rather remaining and growing in grace.

Therefore, permanent conversion is a journey and a process. When we think about conversion, it is not just staying and wandering around the same place, but rather climbing up the mountain toward Jesus. We are called to be disciples on the move. We are called to move from death to life, from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from earthly addictions to setting our eyes on the Lord. We are also called to move from the good to the better and continuing to the best. It is a constant ascent to the Lord.

Everyday, we should open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit to show us which task He is calling us. Be attentive and respond faithfully. Regularly we should reflect on the following questions:

1. What is my current situation?
2. What am I being called to leave behind or how am I being asked to grow?

Only the Holy Spirit can point the way with clarity and it is the Holy Spirit that prepares us to leave something behind in order to walk with Him. Conversion should always be a permanent mindset, always ongoing, always ascending closer to Jesus, and always faithful to the inspiration and action of the Holy Spirit.

Group Discussion:

1. Allow each person to share a short reflection on the two questions above and request each member of the community to help hold them accountable in growing closer to Jesus.
2. Take time as a community to reflect on the current situation of the community and to reflect on how the community as a whole is being asked to grow.

