

I speak to you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

In the city of Port-au-Prince, only several hours after the devastating earthquake, which shattered the little infrastructure, which the impoverished country of Haiti began with, a reporter recounted the events to the best of his memory.

“Several hundred people had gathered to pray at an intersection here at 9:00pm last night, a little more than four hours after the earthquake had devastated much of the Haitian capital. About a block away, on the other side of the Hotel Oloffson, where I was taking cover, there was a gathering of people who had begun to sing.

I couldn't make out many of the words, but "Alleluia" was the refrain for some of the hymns the group at the crossroads sang. A minister was preaching to them using the words Bondye, and kretyen, God, and Christians. The people in the streets responded with bursts of song.

There were frequent aftershocks throughout the night and with each tremor, the singing stopped and the singers wailed in fear; but after several minutes had gone by, the hymns of praise would again resume, and the voices of the Haitian people sang "Alleluia."

As the Cathedral family joins together this weekend to celebrate and reflect on our Patronal Festival of the conversion of Saint Paul, it has occurred to me in a number of ways, that perhaps the dramatic experience of Paul's conversion, speaks to the way in which the world responds to crisis, and need for change; that without a light shining in the darkness, too many remain blind and unaware.

Paul's conversion sees him make a radical 180 degree turn in direction. Having been a persecutor of the innocent, and a contemnor of the Christian faithful, Paul was knocked from his high horse, and made to see a light, like no other, emerging from the darkness of his life.

Although it is an inspiring tale of transformation, and an essential story to the Christian narrative, Paul's conversion experience presents a danger in its teaching, if heard only as a self contained account. Without the context of the life and ministry which followed, and without knowledge of the struggles and obstacles which he would find ahead, the story of Paul's conversion in Christ could be heard as simply an acceptance of truth, which brought all things to be made well.

No different than Paul himself – the moments of grace in *our* lives, when God calls *us* to greater purpose, is just the beginning of the conversion experience itself. It is what emerges out of this powerful beginning which defines what it means to be transformed.

It certainly feels as though the world has been going through a conversion experience of its own, over these last two weeks, as it looks through the television cameras, and newspaper images, to the devastation and suffering in the country of Haiti. The worlds

immediate response has certainly been an admirable thing – from the massive amounts of aid given through the Red Cross and other organizations like it, to the benefit concerts being organized all over the world – raising millions for relief efforts. The global community has certainly broken open the darkness of despair to shine in some light.

But as the days pass and the months go by, will the world still be thinking about the Haitian people, and the devastation which they have endured. Will Haiti quickly become a distant memory, like a Tsunami in the Indian Ocean, or a Hurricane in New Orleans?

No matter where an earthquake of this magnitude had hit, it would have caused serious devastation. But in a place with no infrastructure, no health care, or reliable water – the impact is truly not measurable. Before the quake, there was only ‘survival’ in a country referred to by some as the 4th world – now – there is nothing to fill the void.

How many Haitian people have died in the last two weeks because of untreated treatable injuries? How many have died because of thirst? How many, just

because there was no one there? These are not results of the earthquake itself, but the results of a country devastated even before the earthquake hit.

Perhaps conversion doesn't just see a response to devastation, but sees a radical 180 degree turn in direction. Perhaps conversion is more than just immediate aid and critical relief, but the continued building up of sustainability.

Next Saturday, our Cathedral will be wedging its doors wide open and inviting the wider community, to join us to stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti, as we raise awareness and assistance, through a Benefit Concert of Music and Prayer. But as we approach this event with the greatest of intentions and with hearts filled with care, I would propose that we offer prayers and thoughts as well, for the desolate people and places of our world, both today, in days gone by, to which we have too quickly forgotten.

I would propose that we reflect on the conversions of the past years when we said "never again." I would propose that more important than fundraising at this event, would be the unifying of God's people in ways which cause us never to forget.

Within hours of the tragedy in Haiti, many of the world's citizens were asking "Why God?" But in the streets of Port-au-Prince, amidst the rubble and the screams, were the sounds of the voices of a people singing praises to their God – "Alleluia!" "Emmanuel!" for God had not forgotten.

There is a poem which begins with a dream, 'A dream where I was walking along the beach with God, and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints, one belonging to me and the other to God. When the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life. This really bothered me and I questioned God about it, saying, "God, you said that once I decided to follow

you, you would walk with me always, but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints in the sand. I don't understand why in times when I needed you most, you left me." God replied, "My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you, during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Our God stands with us when we rejoice, reaches out to us when we are sad, and holds us when we cannot stand. It is in the midst of disaster, and death, and dismay, our God lifts us from our feet, and carries until we can walk again.

And in those first steps, when God rests us back upon the ground, when our transformation and conversion truly speak – with outstretched arms, and hands of support, holding each other up – back upon our feet.

Thanks be to God.