

Paul is a very determined character in more than one sense. He is determined in the sense of being strong-willed and being able to persevere in whatever tasks he has decided to pursue. And he is determined by God, that is, *formed* by God in a way that completely undermines or overtakes his own self-determination and yet completes it. This is the mystery of a religious life well-lived and, in our particular instance, of a contemplative life lived in community. If you want to see it through to its end you will need both the grace of a determined character, that is, of one with a will of its own, and the grace of a character willing to be determined by God. The need of grace in each instance is a mark of God's ultimate determination of all. (We can leave the problem of free will to others but, somewhere along the line, we have to assent to our will being somehow subsumed in God.) Today, we celebrate that moment when Paul really surrenders his will to God though he thought, in his previous self-determined way, that he had already done so:

*I was as full of duty towards God as you are today*

And it takes a moment of helplessness, which must come to all of us at some point, in whatever form, if we are to be re-formed in God's image: a moment of surrender when we realise we've been on a false trail all along, that there is something more demanded of us to bring us to completion. And then our own capacity for self-determination, our own strong will comes into its own; is there at God's service in all the further moments of helplessness which now characterise our lives, in all those further moments, including this one, when we realise we haven't really been in charge at all.

Today, we complete the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and it's theme, taken from the Gospel of John: *Abide in my love*: this is what Paul has been reduced to and he revels in it, once the initial shock is over. 'To abide' in John's gospel is a major theme. It translates a word otherwise translated as 'remain', 'endure', 'continue'. This is the grace of perseverance, the gift of life in Christ where our natural gifts are nurtured by God in such a way that what we thought were our own, were God's gifts all along. Paul goes on to do great things for God or rather to have great things done through him; it's a life of constant surprise. *Oh, so this is where I'm going now! Oh, so this is what the Lord wants me to say! Oh, it's you at my doorstep! Oh, I've reached a hundred! Now, how did that happen and so quickly?*

(For those of you not 'in the know', Brother Herbert celebrates his 100th birthday today. His time for meeting St. Paul put off for yet another day)