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Centuries ago the punishment for certain crimes was very, very severe. One man caught stealing sheep had the letters ST (sheep thief) branded on his forehead for all to see. Later, the man had a complete change of heart and turned his life around. By the time he was old, he was much revered and respected among his neighbours. When the children asked their parents what the letter ST stood for on his forehead, they simply said 'Saint' and all the children believed it. A saint is someone who keeps on changing, converting and repenting.

Today, in the gospel we hear about the call of the first apostles. They could be considered as 'raw recruits' but over three years Jesus would gradually take them in hand, deepen their understanding of who he was, and help them develop a closer friendship with him. The only exception was Judas

Isaiah in the first Reading says: "The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light". That could easily apply to the apostles when Jesus first called them to follow him. However, the veil of fear and unbelief was only gradually lifted from their eyes - the one exception being St Paul. He, as we all well know, had a blinding encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus after which he never looked back.

Less spectacular, Peter's conversion started with an admission of his own sinfulness. After the miraculous catch of fish he said: 'depart from me O lord for I am a sinful man'. So let us take comfort from this and not be put off by our own weaknesses. Our failings can even turn out to be our strength if they lead to a greater turning towards the Light, which is Christ Himself.

Blessed John Newman said: 'to live is to change and to live well is to change often'. What about us? From hearing the Gospel,

has anything changed for the better in our lives since this time last year? Have we become kinder, more generous, more forgiving or more prayerful people? People spend a lot of time and money these days converting their homes into something modern, stylish and attractive. But the same needs to apply to our spiritual home. Is my heart open to being the kind of person God wants me to be or am I stuck in a rut - content to hold on to my fears, my prejudices, my un-forgiveness, my lack of love.

Adopting the mind of Christ involves a death to self which often goes against the grain. But Jesus says: 'unless the grain of wheat fall on the ground and dies it doesn't produce any fruit'. Jesus once let the Pharisee know in no uncertain terms that their outward show of repentance was a sham because the fruits of change were absent from their lives.

So, call it what you like, conversion, repentance, renewal new life – it's at the heart of the Christian gospel and incumbent on all who claim to be Christ's followers. It needs to be part of our agenda as well.