

I am grateful to the monks of Conception Abbey for covering mass and confessions here the last few weeks, as well as to our staff and all of you for your patience. I'm just back from the meeting of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, where we learned that the Vatican would like to implement the new English translation of the mass within the next two years. I also attended the meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy in Baltimore, where I had fruitful discussions about studies on the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. On the way to that meeting, some of you have already heard, I was the victim of an assault and robbery attempt. While I was riding the light rail between the airport and the hotel, several juveniles attempted to steal the cell phone right out of my hands. I never let go, so they got nothing, but one of them landed several blows to the back of my head with his fists before they all fled. The Baltimore police are investigating. My head was tender for about a week, but it has healed and doctors tell me I am fine. On hearing this story, my nephews were impressed with the strength of my grip. I told them they'll have to pry my Blackberry out of my cold, dead hands.

Every once in a while you learn that the world is not the way you thought it was. Our nation is watching to see if the Obama presidency is going to turn out the way many people think it will. Our new president has a daunting task, but expectations are running high. As with anyone who fascinates us, even if he succeeds, he will at times disappoint. His inaugural address stood in line with Catholic teaching in many ways: opposing torture, bringing peace where there is war, feeding a hungry world, promoting self-sacrifice, creating jobs, defying the violent aggressors of other nations, and affirming the ultimate triumph of virtue over evil. However, when he said, "We will restore science to its proper place," Catholics would like to hear that its proper place is under the standard of good morals. This week President Obama lifted some restrictions on aid to countries that promote abortion, so our Church would like to see evidence of his pledge that he wants abortions to decrease.

Still, pundits have compared President Obama to a Messiah. Of course, he is not one, and the one Messiah we have, Jesus, chose not to hold any kind of political post. Coming from a poor family, Jesus became a prophet, a rabbi, and a healer, not a ruler of territories. When Jesus came, some people were expecting a political Messiah, and they were disillusioned with him. One of those people was a man named Saul. He was so opposed to the idea that a crucified man could be the Messiah that he persecuted Christians – until one day he learned the world was not the way he thought it was. Jesus appeared to him, and Saul, now known as Paul, became one of his greatest disciples. Through his God-given abilities he convinced many people of the faith he possessed, and helped open Christianity to Jew and Gentile alike.

I think one reason Paul could do this was his inquisitiveness. At the moment Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Paul didn't take it lying down. He asked a question. It's my favorite question in the bible. It was not, "Why me?" which is the favorite question of many people who get knocked down. It was not, "Are you there?" as if God

might not exist. Instead, Paul turned to the voice from heaven and asked, “Who are you?” Paul probably thought he knew exactly who God was. But there is always a part of God that is mysterious to us humans. We have to be ready at key moments in our lives, when the world is not the way we thought it was, to ask this question of Jesus: “Who are you?” because we need help to know better the God who is there – the God who is behind the world we cannot understand. That question can enrich our faith, as it did for Saint Paul.

We gain some of our biggest spiritual insights over a long period of time. We gain others in an instant, when life changes in a way we never expected. God is yearning to reveal himself ever more deeply to us, as long as we are inquisitive enough to ask, “Who are you?” and humble enough to receive the reply.