*“Discover how a persecutor of Christians, who never met Jesus in life, became a pillar of the Church and a model of conversion.”*

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### Introduction: An uncomfortable number, a glorious mission

The number 13 is often associated with bad luck, suspicion, or even curses. However, in the Christian tradition, this number takes on a radically different dimension when we pause to reflect on the figure of Paul of Tarsus. Known as the “13th apostle,” his story is as controversial as it is fascinating: he did not meet Jesus during His earthly life, he was not chosen by the Lord during His public ministry, and yet his voice echoes through much of the New Testament. Was he truly an apostle? By what authority did he preach? Why does the Church recognize him as one?

This article invites you on an educational and spiritual journey through the life of Saint Paul, exploring his history, theology, and the practical impact of his legacy today. Join us in discovering why this man, once an enemy of Christians, is now one of the pillars of the Catholic faith.

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## 1. From Persecutor to Preacher: Paul’s Before and After

### Who was Saul of Tarsus?

Before being known as Paul, he was Saul—a Jewish Pharisee born in Tarsus (modern-day Turkey), a Roman citizen, a zealous adherent to the Law of Moses, and a fierce persecutor of Christians. He described himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews” and a “persecutor of the Church” (cf. Philippians 3:5-6).

> *“Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest…” (Acts 9:1).*

His religious zeal drove him to participate in the persecution and martyrdom of Christians, including Stephen, the first martyr (cf. Acts 7:58).

### The Turning Point: The Road to Damascus

Everything changed in an instant. On his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, a light from heaven knocked him down and a voice spoke:

> ***"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*** *(Acts 9:4)*
> *"Who are you, Lord?" he asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (v.5).*

That mystical encounter was decisive. Blind for three days, Saul received baptism from Ananias, regained his sight, and immediately began preaching that Jesus is the Son of God.

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## 2. Was He Truly an Apostle?

### The Term "Apostle" in the New Testament

Strictly speaking, *apostle* (from the Greek *apostolos*) means "one who is sent." The Twelve Apostles were chosen directly by Jesus and accompanied Him from the beginning. Paul was not among them. So why does the Church recognize him as an apostle?

The key lies in his unique calling. Although he was not an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly life, he was a witness of the Risen Lord. In his letters, Paul firmly defends his apostleship:

> ***"Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"*** *(1 Corinthians 9:1)*

He also states:

> ***"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him***

> ***from the dead—”*** *(Galatians 1:1)*

### The Confirmation of His Mission

After years of preaching, Paul went to Jerusalem and met with the “pillars” of the Church: Peter, James, and John. They not only recognized him but extended “the right hand of fellowship” to him (cf. Galatians 2:9). His mission was officially confirmed by the Church of Christ. The 13th apostle was not an intruder—he was a chosen one.

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## 3. Why Is Saint Paul So Important for Christianity?

### The Great Architect of Christian Theology

Paul is the human author of 13 letters in the New Testament (some debated by modern scholarship), where he develops foundational concepts such as:

- **Justification by faith** (cf. Romans 3:28)
- **The Mystical Body of Christ** (cf. 1 Corinthians 12)
- **The gratuitousness of salvation**
- **The centrality of the Cross and Resurrection**

He was the first to systematize the Christian faith. Saints like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and even Martin Luther (albeit with distortions), leaned heavily on Paul. Without him, our understanding of the Gospel would be fragmented.

### The Missionary Without Borders

Paul traveled thousands of kilometers, founded Christian communities in key cities (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Rome…), and adapted the Gospel to various cultures without betraying its essence. He served as the bridge between the Jewish world and the Gentile world.

He summed up his mission in a famous phrase:

> ***“I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”*** *(1 Corinthians 9:22)*

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## 4. Present Relevance: Paul, Master of Conversion and Inner Freedom

### A Model for the Modern Man

We live in a world where identity is often built on external factors: profession, success, ideology… Paul teaches us that the center of the human person lies in their relationship with Christ. One of his statements can serve as a compass for life:

> ***“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”*** *(Galatians 2:20)*

This message urgently resonates today: Who am I? What is my purpose? Where can I find meaning? Paul answers: in the crucified and risen Christ.

### His Life: A Testament to Resilience and Fidelity

Stoned, beaten, imprisoned, betrayed… yet he never gave up. His life is a song of persevering fidelity. In times of instability, he reminds us that faith is not comfort but courage.

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## 5. Theological and Pastoral Practical Guide: How to Live Like Saint Paul Today

### A. **Convert Every Day**

Conversion is not a one-time event but a lifelong journey. Paul invites us to continually renew our hearts:

- Do a daily examination of conscience. Ask yourself: Do I persecute Christ in others through my judgments or indifference?
- Pray sincerely: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9:6)

### B. **Allow Yourself to Be Formed**

Paul spent years in silence before preaching. He did not act on impulse. Today:

- Study the faith deeply. Read his letters.
- Seek spiritual direction. Let others guide you, as Ananias did for him.

### C. **Be an Apostle in Your Environment**

You don’t need to travel to Corinth or Rome. Your family, workplace, and social media are your mission field. Evangelize through your life.

- Bear witness without imposing.
- Speak of Christ joyfully, not fearfully.
- Love the Church, even with its wounds, as Paul did.

### D. **Embrace the Cross and the Struggle**

> *“I complete in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.” (Colossians 1:24)*

The cross is not a punishment—it is the place where life is born. Embrace your difficulties as paths of grace.

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## 6. Conclusion: The 13 That Changed Us Forever

Paul was indeed the 13th apostle. But he was also the number of transformation. From persecutor to martyr, from legalist to mystic, from enemy to friend of Christ. His life loudly proclaims that **no one is beyond the reach of grace**.

If you've ever thought you're "not holy enough," if you believe you're too much of a sinner, if you doubt your vocation or think it's too late to change… remember Paul.

His story is living proof that **God does not choose the perfect—He perfects those He chooses**.

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Final Prayer:

> ***Lord Jesus, as You did with Saul, knock me off the horse of my pride and blindness. Grant me a deep, courageous, and ongoing conversion. Make me an apostle in my own time, a light for those who do not know You, a comfort to those who suffer, and a faithful witness of Your love. Amen.***

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