

Homily for Ss Peter and Paul

We are a community that relies on inspirational memory. We remember our ancestors in the faith, both to be grateful for them and to learn from them lessons for today. Today we celebrate two of the most glorious Saints of the Christian faith. They are both pillars of the Church, apostles, and martyrs whose unique personalities and experiences have made decisive and permanent contributions to the Body of Christ. Because of the high ranking of today's feast, it takes precedence over the Sunday's celebration or liturgy. Saint Peter was the head disciple whose confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," is the rock on which Christ, our true foundation, has built His Church. That St. Paul plays a glorious role in the formation of the faith is obvious to anyone who knows the New Testament, for he wrote so much of it. He travelled for decades founding and supporting churches, especially among Gentiles.

When we study the lives of these two great saints, we see that they gained absolutely no worldly advantages by their faithful ministry, but their selfless service strengthened the Church in ways too numerous to count. We are here today because of what God did through them and so many other lesser known apostles, martyrs, and evangelists across the ages. Jesus asked Peter who he thought he was and Paul asked the vision he saw on the Damascus road who that was. This is a question which echoes down through time, who are you and who am I in relation to God, in relation to the divine. In this great feast day we are given the core of the answer. We are Peter and Paul, we are questioned by God and we question Him. It is the question by God and our questing of God that evoke changes in our lives. The changing of hearts does not come by law. This is why, in the end, only the Kingdom of God will stand. These two men had their hearts changed by encounter with the Lord, walking in peace and teaching the Kingdom. We should ask what is my relation to Christ, how can I contribute towards the building of the Church. We see in the first reading that Peter shares his experience of being led out of the prison by an angel. Paul very happily acknowledges that he has fought a good fight, finished the race and now waiting for the crown of righteousness. The first century is long gone, but there is plenty of time left in the present century for us to hear and respond to the same risen Lord who called Peter to feed His sheep and Paul to become a missionary to the Gentiles. Each generation is like a new story added to the building or a new branch growing on a tree. Just as a fisherman and a Pharisee became radiant with the divine energies through their repentance and steadfast dedication to Christ, the same can be true of us.

The Church is not built on stones or bricks, but on the change of heart which comes with the love of God and the need then to build the kingdom, hearts aflame with the fire of the Holy Ghost. These two men we honour today founded the Church and through them we receive the power to forgive and to bind, but that power comes from almighty God, to more than we know and in ways we do not understand. From God to whom, and with whom and by whom we are bound on a wheel of fire, through ages of ages.