

Solemnity of Sts. Peter & Paul

June 29, 2025

Imagine a man sitting in a prison cell in Philippi. He's tired. He's not as young as he used to be, and the years have caught up with him. He used to be a faithful, observing, and maybe even zealous follower of Judaism. And he probably could never have imagined that he would ever embrace the path he was currently embracing, the one that got him traveling the world over, telling people that a man put to death in Jerusalem was the long-awaited Messiah.

He used to detest the things these friends and followers of Jesus had been saying. Now and miraculously, he joined their cause. That's the person he had become, and that's who he had chosen to give his life over to, a man from Galilee who was put to death but somehow came to him along a dusty road. But was he making progress? Was he really doing what God wanted? Was he making a difference? At times it probably didn't feel that way. And this was probably one of those times. Was it worth it? Or was it in vain? There's a good chance those sorts of questions flooded his mind. And this man was Paul.

Imagine again, a man sitting in a prison in Jerusalem. He too is tired. After all, he's been through a lot, not as much as his friend Jesus, of course, but difficult things nonetheless. Things had been going well just a couple of years before, but the joy was short-lived. His friend was arrested, and he, himself, came close, choosing to lie rather than put himself in danger. He was ashamed and regretted of that. And it only got worse shortly after that, as he saw his friend put to death, and as he cowered with others, fearing for their lives.

But then things changed. His friend, Jesus, was once again alive. How? He wasn't sure. But for a couple of months he wondered and hoped if better days were ahead until Jesus "left" him and others in two different

ways. Jesus physically left them, but also left them to carry on his mission, continue his work of evangelizing the world.

Jesus also told him something about being the rock on which his Church would be built, and something else about keys, it was all pretty confusing. And some people (especially religious leaders) didn't like what they were hearing, they didn't like what Peter and others were going around saying.

Was it really worth it? Wouldn't it have been better if he had just stayed as an anonymous fisherman going about his daily business? And was continuing the work of Jesus even possible? He didn't consider himself "special", he didn't consider himself anything but "ordinary". And what would "doing the work of Jesus" even look like? He wondered about so many things, sitting in a cell and facing an uncertain future. This man was Peter.

And here we are today, sitting in a church embracing many of the very things they were proclaiming to the world long ago, things no one had ever said before, things no one was ever asked to believe since the creation of the world. Could Peter and Paul have imagined what the Church would become?

Today we gather to celebrate the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, the principal pillars of the Church and their martyrdom, which is an immovable feast that always is celebrated on June 29, so it only falls on a Sunday once in a while. And it's one of the few days which takes the place of the regular Sunday Liturgy. The Church must feel that remembering these two men, these two heroes and asking for their prayers is just that important.

We, of course, are well aware of what they have meant and continue to mean for the life of the Church. These two were "giants" of the faith, yet not at all alike. One was super-educated, confidant, used to running in important circles. And the other was, on the surface, a "regular" guy, doing a common job, and living his life like countless people before him.

Yet, they had two somewhat obvious things in common. One, Jesus chose them. And two, their decision to follow Jesus, to actually put their trust and hopes and lives in his hands, cost them much. In fact, tradition says it costs them their very lives. In other words, the challenges, difficulties, worries, and even sufferings, did not end with Jesus' resurrection and ascension. It was only the beginning.

And these two men embraced the path laid out before them, accepted God's invitation seemingly without counting the cost. And they did so not perfectly. That would be impossible. But they stayed the course, and "finished the race" as St. Paul would someday write. And we owe them a tremendous debt, a debt we can only pay in one way . . . by picking up where they left off.

Of course, countless men and women have done just that, toiled in the fields of the Lord. Some of their names are known to us, while the vast majority of them are known only to God. But here we are, in this holy place, believing these life-changing stories through a combination of two things, the utter graciousness of God and the hard spiritual work of ordinary men and women who have come before us.

It may have begun with Peter and Paul, and the tremendous faith they demonstrated even in the face of danger, but it persisted because believers before us showed the world the beauty and goodness of what it means to believe, what it means to be disciples of the Lord.

And like Peter and Paul, there will be many times when it will feel as though we are behind bars - prisoners of our own shortcomings, of our own failures and weaknesses, of our own fears and doubts, and yes, even feeling weighed down by our own sin. And we will wonder if we are making any difference at all.

It is precisely during these difficult times when we need to look to Peter and Paul and simply continue to be kind, continue to show compassion, continue to forgive, continue to be generous, continue to love, and

continue to make our motives known, the desire to imitate our Lord and Savior. And by doing those things, we won't have to worry whether or not our lives are bearing fruit. We will be changed. Others will be changed. The world will change.

And the faith will continue. Sts. Peter and Paul, pray for us.

Short Story

There is a legend about St. Peter's encounter with Jesus Christ during the persecution of Christians in Rome by Emperor Nero. Fleeing Rome on the advice of many Church members who saw him as indispensable to the continuance of the Church, Peter headed out the Via Appia for the countryside. There Peter encountered Jesus, who was heading toward the city of Rome to face the persecution. "*Quo vadis, Domine?*" Peter asks – "*Lord, where are you going?*" "*I am going to Rome to be crucified,*" Jesus answers and disappears.

A very ashamed Peter stopped and returned to Rome to face his martyrdom bravely, knowing the Church would continue.. Tradition teaches us he was crucified at the foot of Vatican Hill and was buried there. St. Peter's Basilica was constructed over that site, and Peter's remains are buried directly under the High Altar.