

SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER and PAUL - 2008

[Acts 12: 1-11; Psalm 34; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16: 13-19]

Since this Sunday (tomorrow) is June 29th, the calendar feast for today (tomorrow), the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, takes precedence over what would have been the Mass for the Thirteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. An added blessing for the Church this year is that in order to commemorate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of St. Paul our Holy Father, Benedict XVI has declared this a Jubilee Year in honor of St. Paul beginning today (yesterday) June 28, 2008 through June 29, 2009. All this year we are invited to focus in a special way on the message and mission of Jesus as it was proclaimed by Paul the Apostle and through prayer and reflection come to understand Paul's great contribution to the founding of the Church. But for today, we have this opportunity to take a little closer look at these two most dynamic saints of the primitive Church. Their feast is celebrated together because both Peter and Paul traveled to spread Christianity to Rome where they were both martyred for the faith. They are the principal patrons of the Church of Rome.

It would be rather difficult for us to find two individuals who differed more. Peter was a fisherman, an ordinary worker, apparently a large, strong man, he had no formal education of which we might be aware. He responded to Jesus' call to follow and then stumbled his way boldly through the Lord's public life, and beyond. Paul, on the other hand, was an educated man. He studied at the feet of the great Hebrew scholar Gamaliel. Physically, Paul was a small man. Born Saul of Tarsus following his conversion to Christ he was known as Paul, a bit of a joke really because his name in Latin, Paulus means "small." If Peter was brash and bold, Paul was a dynamo and a man of conviction. As a Pharisee, before his conversion, he persecuted the early Christians with the same enthusiasm and boldness as he would preach Christ, after his conversion.

But what they held in common was the fact that they both grew into living a profound, abiding, unabashed, convicted faith in Jesus Christ. Both answered with their very lives Jesus' question in today's Gospel, "*But you, who do you say that I am? – You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*" Peter said it in word before he would know what it truly meant and what it would demand of him. Paul said it by how his life was completely changed by a dramatic conversion experience. Both lived it!

"Impulsive, headstrong, cowardly Peter, repenting of his denial of Jesus, presided over the Christian way at Jerusalem, founded the church at Antioch, opened the newborn faith beyond Judaism, (assumed the leadership of the other disciples conferred on him by Jesus) and ultimately suffered upside down crucifixion on the Vatican hill in Rome. Brilliant, moody, demanding Paul, repenting of his participation in Stephen's death and his persecution of the Christian way, won approval for spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles; translated the Gospel from the Jewish to the Greek cultural milieu; founded communities at Philippi, Ephesus, Galatia, Corinth, Colossae, Cyprus and Crete; and ultimately suffered beheading outside the walls of the city of Rome.

Both men were weak, both frail. Each man struggled against kings and emperor, their own people, and even on occasion one another. But Peter's and Paul's lives paid homage to God and were poured out as a sacrifice for the salvation of others. We gather here today in large measure because Peter and Paul as faithful disciples of Jesus answered well with their whole lives and with their very being the question: "Who do you say that I am?" [Rev. Michael Papesh, June 2008]

What about us? I am always moved when I hear this Gospel simply because Jesus' question is not just for the disciples, then, it is a question for me, for you, and it needs to be answered over and over again in our lives. "*But YOU, who do YOU, say that I am?*"

I am called to say that Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” as I strive, everyday, to say yes again to living celibate priesthood. To encourage, instruct, preach the Word, reconcile, bless, correct, serve, form community, confront, challenge from God’s Word, preside at Eucharist, sacramentalize important moments within community, pray, seek continual forgiveness and conversion of life myself. You say that Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” as you live each day your marriage vows, loving and honoring your wife, your husband; raising your children with care and strength, guiding and loving your grandchildren. You say that Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” as you say yes again each day to what it means to be a vowed Religious in today’s world, seeking conversion of heart by living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience – all in the context of community of life.

You say that Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” as you live the call of the single life with integrity and charity.

We say that Jesus is “*the Christ, the Son of the Living God*” when as children and youth we respect and obey our parents, when we “cooperate with our colleagues at work and enjoy our friends.” We do so “by the way we give our money or volunteer our time to the parish, share our goods with those in need, cope with our loneliness and struggle with suffering...by the way we stand up for what is right, speak to others about our faith, confess... our sins and come to this community, around this table, to give God praise and thanks.”

As we answer this question day in and day out, both for ourselves individually and collectively, we profess our faith, we live out our Baptism, we witness Christ to the world and we live out what it means to be Church. The Church founded on the bold and personal faith of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Mary and the other disciples and the countless others who have gone before us but NOW it is given breath, and a face, and life as boldly and as personally by us, the followers of Christ here in the 21st Century.

As Church let us celebrate in this Eucharist “the ancient and venerable witness” of Sts. Peter and Paul, Apostles, but may this Eucharist also renew in us the power of Christ’s life and as the Disciples of Christ today let us have the conviction of heart to ponder “in our own lives Jesus’ Gospel question: *And you, who do you say that I am?*”

[A compilation of my thoughts and reflections and those of the Rev. Michael Papesh in his homily for PETER AND PAUL 2008: WHO DO YOU SAY I AM? and of the Rev. Larry Gillick, S.J. from his homily for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles in DAILY REFELCTION JUNE 29TH, 2008, Creighton.edu/Collaborative Ministry/062908.html]