

HOMILY for the FEAST of SAINTS PETER & PAUL – Year C

Reflecting on the great role models of Saints Peter & Paul, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A mother called her son on Sunday morning to make sure he got out of bed & was ready for church. "I'm not going," he replied.

"Yes, you are going, so get out of that bed!" his mother demanded.

"Give me one good reason why I should go," said her son.

"I'll give three good reasons. One, I'm your mother, & I say you're going. Two, you're forty years old, so you're old enough to know better. And three, you're the pastor, so you need to be there!"

Anyway, this Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of Sts. Peter & Paul to help us commemorate two saintly giants in our Christian faith. Without them, our Christian Church would not be able to take root & expand beyond the Jewish community. They are comparable to George Washington & Abraham Lincoln, who helped set up the ideal vision for our country & keep everyone united under the flag of USA & worked hard for it. They have been a firm foundation for our Christian Church to stand on & weather all kinds of political conditions in the last two thousand years. They are also excellent role models for us, especially for leaders in the Church & the world to imitate. In this Sunday homily, I'll help us learn more about them & see how they could inspire us to deepen our relationship with Jesus like they did.

First, St. Peter was a fisherman & the Son of John. His real name was Simon. That is why Jesus addressed him in today's Gospel, "Blest are you, Simon, son of John! No mere human has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father." Thankfully his brother Andrew introduced him to Jesus about whom they had probably heard from John the Baptist. Ultimately he gave up his family & possessions to follow Jesus & became His disciple. Jesus later changed his name to Peter (Rock) & made him the Rock on which His Church was to be built. After His resurrection, Jesus gave His authority on earth to Peter & made him the Vicar of the Christ & the head of the Apostles, the first Pope.

The Gospels apparently speak about Peter more than any other Apostle. He was honored on many occasions; several miracles were performed for his benefits; Jesus stayed at his home, preached from his boat, sent him the first message of the Resurrection, & appeared to him personally. Often Peter acted as spokesman for the other Apostles. Finally, his main weaknesses are anger, imperfect faith, impetuosity, & denial of Jesus.

After the Ascension of Jesus, Peter began his work as head of the Church. He directed the election of Matthias to replace Judas, delivered the first public Apostolic Sermon, cured a man lame from birth, & received a divine commission to receive Gentiles into the Church. After the execution of James by King Herod Agrippa, Peter was miraculously rescued from prison as being reported in today's First Reading. He presided at the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem in the year 50, when it was officially declared that the Gentile converts to the faith was not subject to the Jewish Law of circumcision. After he went to Antioch, where it was decided that converted Jews were not bound to observe the Mosaic Law.

St. Peter dwelt in Rome intermittently for 25 years as founder & the first bishop of the Christian Church there. Finally, in the last years of Emperor Nero's reign (64), he was crucified with his head downward at his own request, not deeming himself worthy to die as his Divine

Master did. Evidently two Epistles of the New Testament are attributed to him; & the Gospel of Mark, who was his disciple, has been called "The Gospel of Peter."

Meanwhile, St. Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles & was converted from Judaism on the road to Damascus. He remained there some days after his baptism & then went to Arabia for a couple of years to prepare himself for his future missionary activity. Having returned to Damascus, he stayed there for a time, preaching in the synagogues that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. Because of this, he incurred the hatred of the Jews & had to flee from the city. He then went to Jerusalem to see Peter & pay his homage to the head of the Church. Later he went back to his native Tarsus & began to evangelize his own province until called by Barnabas to Antioch. After one year, on the occasion of a famine, both Barnabas & Paul were sent with alms to the poor Christian community in Jerusalem. Having fulfilled their mission, they returned to Antioch. Soon after this, they both made the first missionary journey (44-50) to Asia Minor.

After the Apostolic Council of Jerusalem, Paul, accompanied by Silas & later also by Timothy & Luke, made his second missionary journey (50-53) previously established by him in Asia Minor & then passing through Galatia. He sailed for Europe to preach the Gospel before returning to Antioch by way of Ephesus & Jerusalem. On his third missionary journey (53-58), Paul visited nearly the same regions as on the second, but made Ephesus, where he remained nearly 3 years, the center of his missionary activity. He laid plans also for another missionary journey, intending to leave Jerusalem for Rome & Spain. But, evidently persecutions by the Jews hindered him from accomplishing his purpose. After two years of imprisonment at Caesarea, he finally reached Rome, where he was kept another 2 years in chains. He was released, then traveled to Spain before heading back to Rome, where he was imprisoned a second time, & in the year 67 was beheaded. He left behind 14 Epistles & other Letters that are no longer in existence. In his Epistles, St. Paul shows himself to be a profound religious thinker & have an enduring formative influence in the development of the Christian Church.

My dear brothers & sisters, although both St. Peter & St. Paul are important figures in our Christian Church, they had their own weaknesses like the rest of us. Peter denied knowing Jesus while Paul mistakenly imprisoned & killed many early Christians. However, they both sincerely repented & decided to commit themselves totally to the risen Christ after their conversions. Christ was able to use them as the effective instruments for His mission of salvation. May we look up to Saints Peter & Paul as our role models & be the effective instruments of Jesus like them to help our world come closer to the Kingdom of Heaven.