

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

June 29, 2014

Readings: Acts 12: 1-11; 2 Tim. 4: 6-8, 17-18; Matt. 16: 13-19

It is a very joyous weekend in Rome, as the city celebrates the twin pillars of the Church. Earlier today, our Holy Father bestowed the pallium to each of 24 new residential Archbishops, including the Archbishop of Hartford, the lone American this year. It is a joyous weekend here too, because we honor our own patron.

The ancient esteem given to this feast in Rome is shown by the fact that in the early centuries, the popes celebrated Mass twice in the same day: first in St Peter's Basilica and then at St Paul Outside the Walls. The Roman Poet Prudentius wrote a wonderful poem about this day, acknowledging both its joys and difficulties:

“Double trophy, double riches, claiming homage of the queen city. Let us hasten our steps that we may be able to share in the two feasts; let us not lose one of the sacred hymns.”¹

Let's be honest- walking nearly four miles in the Roman heat is no cakewalk! The distance between the basilicas presented challenges, and so eventually St. Gregory the Great generously allowed people the option of choosing one or the other. Both saints were honored each time, and the feasts became joined into one.

Saint Augustine wrote about this ancient feast, observed in his day:

There is one day for the passion of two apostles. But these two also were as one; although they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, Paul followed. We are celebrating a feast day, consecrated for us by the blood of the apostles. Let us love their faith, their lives, their labors, their sufferings, their confession of faith, their preaching.²

¹ Prudentius, Peristeph. Hymn, xii

² Augustine, Sermo 295, 1-2, 4, 7-8; PL 38, 1348-1352

“Peter went first, Paul followed.” This becomes yet another reason for Peter’s acknowledged pre-eminence, that he stood for the Church’s universality and unity, when he was told, “*To you I am entrusting,*” what has in fact been entrusted to all. Each of us has a role to play in the preservation of the faith according to our state in life; each of us can be a missionary, like Peter and Paul.

We are so blessed to have many volunteers in our parish who help to carry out the important mission of making our Lord known and loved. Whether they assist in the liturgy, help at Dorothy Day, bring Communion to the homebound, clean the church, serve as a sponsor in RCIA, assist with Coffee and Donuts, bake Lemon pies, greet the many visitors who come through the door, keep good order as ushers and a host of other ways, they contribute to making our Church a welcoming presence on Cathedral Hill, a light to the nations. That is faith in action.

Saint Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20 “It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.” These are powerful words. Think about them for a moment. Does Christ manage our speech, our actions of charity and even sustain us in our sufferings? If so, he truly dwells in us. The Word of God is rich food for meditation. Our Bibles must not collect dust on the shelf. On this feast, I take this opportunity to encourage you to make a special effort to read the Letters of Saint Paul from the New Testament. They are generally brief, but are filled with spiritual treasures beyond belief. Meditate upon them– let them sink into your soul by means of *this divine reading*, the close, spiritual reading of texts.

I have also found it personally fruitful to meditate upon classic paintings, even if I simply see them in a book. There is no need to let distance prevent us from meditating on these masterpieces: Study and pray the classical paintings of Saint Paul such as Rembrandt’s

Saint Paul at his Writing-Desk (1629-1630), Caravaggio's masterpiece, "The Conversion of Saint Paul" (1600), Michelangelo's The Conversion of Saul (1542-1545), Raphael's Saint Paul Preaching in Athens.

They are amazing works, as we gaze on the looks on their faces, especially that of Saul at the time of his conversion. When we are captured by the love of Christ, we change. We will never be the same again, just as when we are infused with sanctifying Grace at Baptism, our souls are changed forever.

We are spiritually close to Saint Paul in any number of ways here. As a sign of this spiritual closeness, the Cathedral has received the gift of a stone taken from the ancient wall surrounding the tomb of the apostle Paul, from the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, with which we have a special bond of spiritual affinity Today, we are announcing a special pilgrimage next year in honor of the 100th anniversary of the completion of this great building. It will be a great opportunity to honor our patron. Today's bulletin insert gives more details.

The Church is apostolic because She was founded on the apostles, because She continues to keep and hand on the Sacred Deposit of Faith, and because She continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the apostles through their successors in pastoral office, the Bishops. Today is a day of rejoicing, but also a day of challenge, for we must each do our part to keep pure and intact the living Faith of the Church. In so doing, we most assuredly honor the great Sts. Peter and Paul.