

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul- Apostles (observed)
June 28, 2015 Fortnight for Freedom
Readings: Acts 12:1-11; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16:13-19

Today marks the one of the truly great Solemnities of our Church—that of Saints Peter and Paul. It is also a day of special significance for our parish, as one of our Patronal Feast Days. Truly, it is right and just to give thanks to God this day, and to offer thanks for the many graces He has bestowed upon this Archdiocese over the last 160 years and please God, for generations to come.

Christians in Rome would gather at the grave of St. Peter in the evening, planning to remain present throughout the night in solemn vigil. They brought along their sick who were hoping to find relief at the tomb. They chanted psalms and sang hymns. They were intent upon asking that the grace of redemption may flow through the hands of St. Peter to those who had assembled. For a time these feasts were separated for a day, so that people who honored the tomb of St. Peter, could also walk the 6 kilometers to the tomb of St. Paul the following day, and venerate his tomb, a stone from which is on display.

In today's first reading, it is clear that the power for working miracles that Jesus possessed had in fact been given to St. Peter. As the lame man lying next to the pool of Siloam was cured by Jesus, so, too, was this crippled man cured by St. Peter in the temple area. There is a strong parallel here.

In the second reading from St. Paul's letter to Timothy, the Apostle to the Gentiles boasts of the fact that he has completed the race, that he has kept the faith. He who had originally been violently opposed to this "New Way" now has been chosen to proclaim that very Gospel to the Gentiles, and it was the Lord who stood by him, giving him strength.

Finally, the Gospel recalls that it was the Lord Jesus, who bestowed upon Peter the keys to the kingdom, who is given precedence on this double feast. Recall, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul is observed in January. It is important to note that both of these Apostles died a martyr's death. This in itself reminds us that from the very beginning of the Church's history, opposition and persecution were common experiences. Thus, such threats have existed throughout the ages, including today.

The United States Bishop's Conference is holding their Fortnight for Freedom because they see serious increments of governmental interference that are threatening our God-given freedoms today. First among those we must mention is the HHS Mandate that seeks to coerce for-profit employers with more than 50 employees, as well as non-profit employers, to provide healthcare insurance that includes coverage for contraception, sterilization and abortifacients, irrespective of the beliefs of an employer, who may hold such services as being immoral. Stiff fines, assessed by the IRS, are to be leveled against those who do not comply. The message is clear: either cooperate with evil or go out of business.

Catholic Charities in Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia and in the State of Illinois have already shut down their adoption and foster care services because they refuse to place children with same-sex couples or unmarried opposite sex couples who co-habitat. Again, the message is clear: cooperate with evil or go out of business.

After years of widely acknowledged excellent work, Migration and Refugee Services (an arm of the Bishops' Committee on Migration) may no longer administrate contract services to victims of human trafficking, because the Federal Government changed its contract specifications to

require them to provide or refer women for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Church teaching.

The words of Jesus, spoken to Peter in St. John's Gospel, could be rightly used to describe the current struggle: "When you were younger, you used to dress yourself, and go where you wanted. But when you are older, someone else will dress you and take you to a place you would rather not go." It seems clear that we are indeed being taken by governmental agencies to places we would rather not go, and we need to respond.

I do not know if the kind of religious persecution that is being endured in the Middle East and parts of Asia will one day come here. But it seems irrefutable that religion is increasingly seen in our own day, and in our own nation, as an enemy to the rights claimed by the State. Friday's Supreme Court decision will embolden those who think that the Church is discriminatory, and there will be calls for the Church to no longer be allowed to perform a sacramental marriage that carry civil effects.

Contrary to the claims of so many, religion is not the enemy of dignity, human rights or right reasoning. Rather, it stems from the well-ordered life; indeed, it is precisely *from* the religious life, that these virtues flow. On the Feast of Ss. Peter and Paul, let us turn to our heavenly patrons for the graces we need to defend not only our rights, but the cherished heritage of this country, a country in which religion and state should always be allies in building up the common good, a civilization of liberty and justice for all.