

## Homily for the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul – June 29, 2008

*Acts 3:1-10 - Galatians 1:11-20 - John 21:15-19*

St. Peter, a stubborn fisherman  
who sometimes said the wrong thing at the wrong time:  
Peter, who didn't want Jesus to wash his feet at the last supper,  
who pledged fidelity to Christ unto death,  
and who, only hours later, denied he knew Jesus not once or twice  
but three times, and just when Jesus most needed his support...  
If St. Peter were walking in Rome today and asked,  
"What's that big building over there?"  
and as told, "Why, that's St. Peter's Basilica!"  
He'd probably ask, "Peter *who*?"

St. Paul, a zealot whose first zeal was persecuting Christians:  
a zealot who came to Christ because Christ came to him  
- out of the blue –  
as a flash of light that knocked him down and struck him blind;  
Paul who would travel as a missionary for Jesus  
whom he had never met in the flesh;  
Paul who wrote all those *letters* we read,  
weekend after weekend...  
Imagine Paul walking into this church today  
and hearing us read from his letter to the Galatians.  
How amazed and shocked he would be to find  
that some 2,000 years after he wrote them,  
we are still reading his words.  
Can't you hear him asking,  
"Has no one written something else in 2,000 years?"

These two men were committed to Christ and his gospel,  
committed enough that each of them would be martyred.  
Discipleship that leads one to lay down one's life for the name of Jesus is  
discipleship of the highest order. Peter and Paul show us two very different  
approaches to discipleship. Peter was a slow learner in the faith. He made a lot of  
mistakes –and some of them were very big mistakes. He loved Jesus and yet  
denied that he even knew him. Still Jesus never failed to offer Peter compassion  
and mercy, and always the opportunity to begin again even as he asks three times  
in today's gospel,  
"Peter, do you love me?"

Paul, on the other hand, came to faith in Christ, in almost an instant! Although  
he's often pictured as being knocked off a horse on the road to Damascus, the  
scripture only tells us that he was struck down by a great light. But three days  
later Paul turned away from persecuting the Church to become a voice of the  
gospel for the nations, bringing Christ's message to the Gentiles.

Peter *stumbled* in his faith: first proudly professing, then cowardly denying and finally preaching Christ Jesus, his Lord, and ultimately laying down his life for the name of Jesus. But Paul, from the first moment of faith, never backed away: his passion for the faith and his earnest desire to be *faithful* made him a driven man – for Jesus.

From persecutor to preacher: quite a career change!

It's a bit of a caricature but we might imagine two "faith types" here: the *Peter Type* and the *Paul Type*. Most of us, I think, probably fall into the *Peter Type*: those who try to do the right things – but who make mistakes; those who mean well – but often don't follow through; those who try to understand but who don't always get it and when they do get it, they sometimes don't always get it right; those who fail, who repent, who get discouraged when they fail yet again, and who keep coming back, through God's mercy, to try again.

*I will never desert you, Lord...*

*Jesus? I don't know the man...*

*Do you love me?*

*Oh, Lord you know that I love you...*

Those who have the Paul *faith type*, on the other hand, are gung-ho!

They're convinced! They say it out loud!

They make big demands on others – as well as on themselves.

They push the envelope. They aren't satisfied with half-measures.

They say the hard saying – and aren't afraid to say it.

They preach fearlessly and without reservation.

The "Paul types" fail, too. But when they do they admit it, they do penance and they forge ahead stronger than ever.

(*Paul Types* can be very annoying!)

Actually, there's a *continuum* between these two types and each of us falls somewhere along that span. Some of us are Peter, some of us are Paul and many of us are of both types at different times and places in our lives.

A couple of important things to note here:

1) The Church at its founding and all through the ages –even today- needs both Peter and Paul for the body of Christ to thrive.

2) Paul is not greater than Peter, nor is Peter more repentant than Paul. They are different, but therein lies the grace of God for all.

3) Peter and Paul, as different as they are, are both *saints* in the sight of God and in the judgment of the Church. And they are holy because in the end, arriving by different paths, both Peter and Paul chose: spirit over flesh,

neighbor over self  
and sacrifice over comfort.

No, not everyone needs to be Paul.  
But those who are like Peter need to listen to Paul  
and take to heart the depth of his zeal.  
And yes, those like Paul need to be patient with Peter  
and have compassion for those who, by nature,  
tend to stumble along rather than win the race.

The Lord's table at the last supper was big enough  
to reserve a seat for Peter  
who hours later would deny he knew his host  
but who, a few years later, would heal in Jesus' name.

And there's room here for Paul who was not at the last supper  
but who wrote so beautifully of our share  
in the one loaf which is his body,  
the one cup which holds his blood.

So all you Paul's, Paula's and Pauline's – come to the table!  
All you *Peter's*, Petula's and Pierette's – come to the table!

Come to the table where Peter's sins are forgiven  
and Paul's zeal for the gospel is nourished.

There is room, here, for us all!

*-ConcordPastor*