

Sts Peter and Paul

A lectionary-based session adapted from 'Foundations in Faith, RCL Benzinger, 5th Printing 2013)

Background

This solemnity honours two great saints who, between them, represent the Church's mission to both Jews (Peter's leadership was exercised from the Jerusalem church) and Gentile (Paul is known as the "Apostle to the Gentiles"). Saint Peter, revered by Catholics as the "first Pope", enjoys first place among the Apostles and has a profound significance for the Church. Saint Paul is likewise a towering figure, whose theological genius, evangelical fervour, and tireless pastoral ministry were so instrumental in the founding of the Christian religion. When we honour Peter and Paul, we honour the Church as well, for their contributions have forever marked the faith and life of God's people.



Readings:

Acts 12:1-11

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

Matthew 16:13-19

Opening Prayer

Through the prayers of the Apostles Peter and Paul,
may we who received faith through their preaching
share their joy in following the Lord
and spreading the faith of the Church.
We pray this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Song

'We Are Called,' David Haas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DCzqHV-Xns>

1. The Person of Peter

Read the Gospel

In this passage Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, and is in turn acclaimed by Jesus. Given a new title ('rock' was not a known personal name at that time) and a mission of teaching authority through the passing of the 'keys' and the power of binding and loosing, Peter is thus established by Jesus in a special role because of his confession of faith.

Reflect:

- Peter, as the rock or foundation of the Church, gave his life to spread the faith and eventually was martyred. Share/journal: what do you think it might have been like for Peter to be called 'rock' by Christ, to have the keys of the kingdom entrusted to him, and to live this out in his life?

Read Acts

This reading details Peter's miraculous escape from prison. The circumstances of his release accentuate the element of divine intervention. The fervent prayer of the Christian community makes the further point that the power of prayer outstrips that of tyrants.

Reflect:

- In this reading from Acts, James had just been beheaded when Peter was arrested. The Church, that is the community of believers, was praying fervently for people. It was a time of great faith and wondrous activity: Peter freed by angels and led to safety; Paul rescued from the lion's mouth. Share/note down those times in your own life when you experienced the presence of great faith.

2. The Person of Paul

This second reading speaks in the Apostle's own voice. Here, speaking from prison, he reflects on his suffering and imminent death. He uses three metaphors to express the significance of his life: a 'libation', being poured out suggesting Paul sees his death as sacrificial; a 'dissolution', suggesting his death will be a release from the labours he has undertaken for the sake of the Gospel; a 'fight' or 'race' to be won, suggesting a purposeful life and death, made glorious by an everlasting reward in Heaven.

Read 2 Timothy

Reflect:

- Note the image of Paul assuring the community of receiving a crown of victory, running a good race, and keeping the faith.
- We are given the images of the Church at prayer, an angel freeing Peter from prison, running the race, a crown, the rock, and the keys. Share/journal: What are images of faith for you?

PUTTING FAITH INTO PRACTICE

Consider ways in which you can spread the faith to others.

CLOSING PRAYER

I thank you, God, for Peter and Paul

and their untiring and unwavering faith.

You have built the Church upon the rock of Peter's faith.

Bless the Church with a solid faith.

May Paul's example inspire me and the entire Church to proclaim her faith.

May Peter and Paul's untiring witness and prayers lead me to full life with Christ.

I pray through Christ, who is Lord now and forever. Amen.

COLLEGIALITY

The faith was spread to both Jews and Gentiles through the activity of Peter and Paul. Jesus handed over to Peter authority for the founding of a church. This is symbolised when Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus gives the power to bind and loose, which is viewed as the teaching authority. Jesus calls Peter the 'rock', the first leader following Jesus. Peter has come to be called the first pope, and all popes are successors of Peter. The office is sometimes referred to as 'the chair of Peter'.

The pope is also the bishop of Rome, which is understood as the foundation of unity in the Church. Collegiality is a Catholic teaching that describes an essential element in the ecclesial ministry of the bishop. This element derives from Jesus, who at the start of his own public ministry called the Twelve to follow him. Selected by Christ and formed as a group, the disciples were sent on mission together. Thus, Catholic bishops today, who are the successor apostles, exercise their episcopal ministry from within a similar group created by Christ, that is, the college of bishops. They cannot exercise this ministry, however, without also being in communion with the bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter and head of this college of bishops. In our own times, the Second Vatican Council also addressed the reality of how the college of bishops functions. The Council reiterated that the body of bishops is the successor to the college of apostles and affirmed that, "Together, with their head, the pope, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church; but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff." (*Lumen Gentium [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church] §22*)

DID YOU KNOW?

- Paul, who first persecuted the Church, had his name changed by God from Saul at the time of his conversion. He is considered the preeminent missionary of the gospel to the Gentile (non-Jewish) world.
- Rocks have been long denoted holy or special places. The various stones in Britain and Ireland (eg Stonehenge, circles of stones in Avebury, Celtic cross in Callenish, Scotland, Newgrange, Ireland) mark sacred sites.
- According to an ancient custom of the Church, an ordaining bishop who is consecrating a new bishop must, ordinarily, be assisted by two other bishops who co-consecrate. The three of them together signify the whole body of bishops.
- An ecumenical council is the most concrete example of collegiality. The whole body of bishops acts in union with the pope in their deliberations and decisions. Another form of leadership within the Church that manifests collegial workings are specific groupings of bishops organised around provinces, patriarchies, regions, or bishops' conferences by countries. In less concrete fashion, collegiality is also manifested by individual bishops throughout the world who show their concern for the universal Church by governing well their own local diocese.