

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul (Homily for June 29, 2025)

Today we pause our usual journey through Ordinary Time to celebrate two extraordinary men - Saint Peter and Saint Paul, the twin pillars of our Church. These men, so different in personality, background, and calling, were united in one great mission: to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior - and to give their lives for Him.

Peter was the son of Jona and brother of Andrew. He was a professional fisherman from Bethsaida, a fishing town on the Lake of Galilee (Gennesaret). He might have been a follower of John the Baptist. It was his brother Andrew who introduced him to Jesus, and Jesus who changed his name from Simon to Cephas or Peter. Jesus made him the leader of his apostles.

In today's Gospel, we hear that powerful moment at Caesarea Philippi, when Jesus asks His disciples, *"Who do you say that I am?"* It's Peter who steps forward with the bold declaration: *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* And Jesus responds with the foundation of our faith: *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church."*

What an incredible moment! Peter, a simple fisherman from Galilee, becomes the chosen leader of the Apostles. Not because he was perfect - far from it. He doubted, he denied Jesus, he made mistakes. But he always returned to Jesus with love and trust. God chose Peter not for his strength, but for his faith.

Paul, the "Apostle to the Gentiles" and the greatest missionary was a Roman citizen by birth as he was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a Province of Rome. His original name was Saul. He was trained as a tent-maker and practiced that trade. As a Pharisee he was sent to Jerusalem by his parents to study the Mosaic Law under the great Rabbi Gamaliel. Well-versed in the Scriptures, he became a religious fanatic and was ready to destroy the Christian faith.

Once a persecutor of Christians, a man whose hands supported the martyrdom of Stephen. And yet, God didn't abandon him. On the road to Damascus, Paul's heart was broken open by Christ's mercy. From that moment, he became the Church's greatest missionary - traveling, preaching and writing letters that still inspire us today.

Peter and Paul both died as martyrs in Rome - Peter by crucifixion, Paul by beheading. Two very different lives, united in one love for Christ, one unshakable faith, and one Church.

So what can we learn from them today?

First, like Peter, we are invited to answer Jesus' question: *"Who do you say that I am?"* Is He just a teacher to us? A historical figure? Or is He truly our Savior, our Lord, the center of our life? If we believe He is Lord, then we are called to live that faith - every day.

Second, let us, like Paul, be open to conversion. No matter what our past has been, God can use us for His glory. It's never too late to start again. Never too late to surrender your heart.

Finally, may we have the zeal of Paul and the loyalty of Peter. Let's ask for the courage to share our faith - not just in words, but in service, love, and forgiveness. We experience Christ in Scripture, in the Eucharist, in prayer - and especially in the people around us.

Let me close with a little story: A young girl from Alabama once visited a church up North. It was her first time witnessing Holy Communion, and when she returned to her pew, she whispered to her grandmother, "*Jesus certainly wasn't from Alabama!*" Her grandma asked, "Why do you say that?" And the girl replied, "*Because that was the poorest meal I've ever seen. Mama would've at least given everyone some cornbread and sweet tea!*"

Yes, the Lord's Supper may look simple - a small host, a sip of wine - but behind it is the infinite love of Jesus, poured out for us. And that love is what drove Peter and Paul to give their lives.

May we, too, be moved by that love - to believe, to witness, and to serve.

Let us also seek the intercession of Saints Peter and Paul to lead a life based on the Catholic Values amidst all difficulties in the world.