

## *Peter & Paul (2014)*

### *Two Different Apostles*

It's hard to imagine two apostles more different from each other than Peter and Paul. One was a fisherman with little education, the other an educated man trained in the Law of Moses. One was a follower of Jesus, the other a persecutor. One ministered to the Jewish people, the other to the Gentiles. And yet both died Rome as martyrs for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Peter was, I suspect, the kind of man you couldn't help but like: generous and impetuous. When Jesus called him to be his disciple, he immediately left everything to follow him. When the crowds left Jesus because his teaching was too difficult, Jesus asked his disciples if they too would leave him, and Peter replied "To whom shall we go Lord? You have the words of eternal life." When Jesus asked his disciple who they thought he was, Peter was the first to confess that he was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. When Jesus told his disciples they would scatter and abandon him, Peter was the first to say that he would give his life for Jesus rather than flee in fear.

But it was this same Peter who refused to accept that Jesus had to suffer and die. It was this same Peter who denied Jesus three times. And it was this same Peter, with all of his faults and failures, that Jesus made the rock foundation of his church.

Paul was a different kind of person, one who has often been misunderstood. Zealous, driven, single-minded and intense, it's hard to imagine spending a relaxing evening with him. Unlike Peter, he was trained in the Jewish Law, and from his youth he was zealous for all of the laws and customs of his people. Consequently, when Peter and others began to proclaim that a crucified man was God's Son, Paul persecuted those who professed this faith. How could a crucified criminal be God's Messiah? Why would anyone believe in a crucified Savior?

But it was this same Paul, the great persecutor of the church, whom God called to be the great apostle to the Gentiles. It was this same Paul to whom the risen Christ appeared in all his glory. It was this same Paul who now became so zealous for Christ that he traveled the entire world to preach the gospel.

I love all of the saints, but I love Paul more than all of them. The letters of Paul, which I read every day, have changed and transformed my life. They are the basis of my life and ministry. The example of this man has taught me what it means to be a pastor, even though I could never be the pastor he was. The example of this man has shown me what it means to evangelize, even though I could never be the evangelist he was.

This feast teaches me three lessons. First, God works through frail, flawed, and fragile human beings. Peter denied Jesus, Paul persecuted him, and yet Christ made Peter the rock foundation of the church and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. Second, if our parish is to thrive it needs the talents of different people, people as different as Peter and Paul. A parish that does not embrace such different talents cannot grow. Third, this feast reminds me of what is most central to my own faith: Jesus Christ, my crucified and risen Lord. As we celebrate this feast, we ask for the grace to live in the grace these great apostles teach us.