

**Reflection on Feast of Saints Peter and Paul**  
**June 29, 2020**  
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The feast of Saints Peter and Paul is a solemnity because these two were the great leaders, some say “pillars,” of the early Church, foundation stones who took the Mission of Jesus to the Jewish community and to the Gentiles. Peter, one of Jesus’ first followers, one of the 12 who companioned Jesus, learned from him, caught the faith, as we hear in today’s Gospel. Peter, the Rock, believed Jesus was, in fact the Christ, the Messiah, the son of the Living God!

Paul, not one of the original 12 but nevertheless, because of his confrontation with the Risen Jesus as he was persecuting the early Church, had a radical conversion which led him to be the zealous missionary to the Gentiles! This led him eventually to carry the Gospel to Greece and Rome, where he and Peter both gave their lives for their Faith.

Peter and Paul though were very different. Peter, an illiterate fisherman, bold, impetuous, capable of fear, doubt, denial and yet chosen to be the Rock upon which Jesus would build his Church. Paul, an educated Pharisee, persecuting the believers of the Way, became the one who spread the Gospel far abroad. Carroll Stuhlmüller says that Peter stands for the line of continuity; more cautious, always seeking the survival of the Church, whereas Paul stands for the line of enrichment; he developed a theology of a world apostolate, dreaming of new visions, taking them to new places, new lands. Actually, the Church, human society and each individual is a mixture of both of these lines, the stable tradition and the new ideas, for new evolving situations, all led by the Holy Spirit.

We celebrate their leadership today, the miracle of their discipleship, because many of us recall this day, June 29, as the day of our First Profession and our Final Profession! We were beginning, after initial formation, our lives as professed religious about to continue our lives as disciples, ministers, missionaries in a real-life setting, whether that was as a primary, elementary or secondary teacher. We carried with us the formation in the Gospels we’d had, the companionship we’d experienced with the Risen Christ and the deep desire to spread the Mission of Jesus to the children, the people of the Church we were sent to.

I remember the first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles especially, where Peter is in prison, heavily guarded, but as the text says, “but **prayer by the Church** was fervently being made to God on (Peter’s) behalf.” As a result, an angel was sent to lead him out from the prison, despite the sleeping guards.

Peter’s response when he realized what had happened: “Now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod. ...”

Like Peter, sometimes we don’t realize until afterward that God did respond to the prayer for deliverance. Only in hindsight do we **recognize God’s action** in our behalf.

But the Psalm articulates what he and we need to express at this point: Ps. 34 cries out with joy: "I will bless the Lord at all times. ... I sought the Lord and God answered me and delivered me from all my fears, from all my distress, God saved me! Imagine the gratitude: The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear God and delivers them! Blessed is the one who takes refuge in God!"

Here is the power of prayer. Here is the power of prayer of the Church! God sends an angel to save, to deliver Peter, and us.

It might be good to think back in our own memories when this same experience might have happened to us. God sending an "angel" to save us ...

As we began our lives after taking vows at our Profession, we were full of joy, confidence and faith, that indeed God had called us to be disciples of Jesus, had sent us to continue the mission of Jesus, in the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s and into the 2000s. As we look back at our many years of ministry, we have learned much as we were companions of Jesus, as the Gospel message deepened in each of us through our struggles and challenges, our joys and our sorrows. We have often had to surrender to things we didn't expect, to stretch and find new meaning beyond the vision we had in our youth. Life has evolved, the meaning of our vows has evolved. We can learn much by reflecting on the Apostles we are celebrating today.

God used them as they were, in all their humanness, often making mistakes ... but God used the gifts he had giving each one to help "grow the Church." God was giving them the strength to continue to proclaim the Good News to both Jews and Gentiles. And God would rescue them no matter the situation.

Today we want to pray that we may continue our Faith Journey, to widen the tents, go beyond into many other peoples and cultures that God is sending us to in our world. But let us look to Peter and Paul and pray:

Peter and Paul became humble in your service, O God, lead us all to the truth of our littleness and our **total dependence** upon you. Bless our Church today with leaders open to your Spirit that your Word will live on in us and lead us to your Reign.