

Homily **Solemnity of Ss Peter & Paul** - Year C (30.6.19)

This Feast of Saints Peter and Paul is combined because both died in Rome. They reckon that they were martyred within a short space of each other. Well, they know more certain that Peter was executed around 64 AD and Paul anywhere between 65 and 67 AD. You can see how Rome, as the centre of the empire and where the faith spread to, why it became such an important See and had such great prestige in other people's eyes, because of these two great apostles.

And **Paul**, of course, **was the apostle of the gentiles**, as he's called, because he went on missionary journeys to Cyprus, to Asia Minor, to Greece, to Macedonia. And it's believed from Rome, where he was originally released, he also went to Spain and then was arrested and came back to Rome and was executed. And he agreed with Peter over **Peter being the apostle of the Jewish converts** and he of the new gentile converts, although Peter obviously received into church many gentiles.

But the real issue is the consequences for the church and the importance of an understanding of Peter's role with Paul; **Paul the teacher** and **Peter preserving the tradition**. Even though Peter and Paul had a fallout over one issue, it's interesting because Paul wasn't one of the original 12. He became an apostle by a revelation from Jesus Christ, and the other apostles accepted that this was genuine. And equally, even though Paul disagreed with Peter

over this important issue, Paul recognized that Peter was the leader of the church. That's very important from those early beginnings.

And we see it in the New Testament, and beyond, that Peter was not just the leader of the apostles but he had a privileged position in his relationship with Christ. And, of course, as we've heard in the gospel Jesus gave him the new name **Cephas**;

"This is the rock on which I will build my church," this rock of faith,
"and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

And he gave him the power of binding and loosing. In another gospel, it says he gave that to all the apostles, but it's emphasized with Peter implying he takes precedence. And that lovely phrase,

"The keys of the kingdom of Heaven," that's powerful.

If you think about that, that is saying that Peter is the earthly gatekeeper. Just as Jesus proclaimed,

"I am the gate," in John's Gospel, Peter is his representative of that gate on earth. And he was commissioned, of course, in John's Gospel to feed the lambs and sheep of Christ's flock.

And after the resurrection, it's all in Scripture, we see Peter taking a lead in replacing Judas. He takes the lead and organizes the election of Matthias. He was the first apostle to perform a miracle in the name of Jesus. It was last night's gospel, the cripple at the Pool of Bethesda. He gave courageous testimony before the Sanhedrin and of course, ended up in prison as we heard in the readings today. And he took a leading role in the first council of

the church called The Council of Jerusalem in 60 AD over controversies of the day.

And we have the testimony, very early on, from when the apostles died off, of people like Clement, Ignatius and Irenaeus who lived from the end of the first century into the second. And Clement, of course, of Rome, he, like those early Popes, used to actually send letters of instruction to other churches. And no other Bishop dared to do this. Each Bishop was independent. But all the Bishops accepted that the Bishop of Rome, who later got the title Pope, had a right to make rulings on controversial issues. And hence we have the birth, very early on, of the primacy of the See of Rome.

So this feast is not so much just about these two saints, but about the very foundation stones of the church. And it's reflected in the preface of today's Mass that it is about the teaching authority and the tradition and unity of the church.