



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Solemnity of St Peter & St Paul

I have fought the good fight

Readings: Acts 12: 1-11, Ps 34, 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17, 18, Matthew 16: 13-19

You don't always get to work in the places you like or with the people you would choose. It's one of the things you have to get used to when you become a Christian. God asks you to do something and you find yourself in the most unlikely of places with a bunch of strange people working well outside your comfort zone. That is the nature of mission and ministry and it has always been the same.

Today is a great feast of two of the greatest saints in the Christian calendar.

They could not have been more different.

Peter, the fisherman from the Galilee shoreline, the humble seeker at the Jordan, the great enthusiast, the impetuous speaker, the coward, the Christ denier, the penitent, the leader, the encourager of the brethren, the authoritative voice, the martyr, the heart of love for Jesus.

And Paul, the serious player, the bright kid from the diaspora, the pupil of the top rabbi, the rigorist, the ruthless, the one man inquisition for the Sanhedrin, the convert, the penitent, the new kid on the block, the

theologian who put it all together, the fearless missionary, the teacher of the world, the martyr, the heart of love for Jesus.

In terms of background, personality, education, experience, family life, temperament, sociability, sensitivity, you name it...they were extraordinarily different men.

BUT... God used them, together and apart, members of the same team, twin pillars upon which the life of the early church was constructed and the foundations, with St. John and Our Lady, of the Church's self-understanding and vocation, from the events on the Bethany Road and the Damascus highway all the way until Christ comes again in glory.

There are three things in my lists of attributes of these great men that overlap.

The first is that they were penitents. Unless a man has stood at the foot of the Cross and seen the cost of his sins and the amazing response of God's love he will not be a realistic witness to the Gospel. Penitence is the driver of the Gospel. It is why the Sacrament of Reconciliation remains a powerhouse. 'Repent and believe' remains the primary call of the Gospel.

The second is that they were martyrs. In their case that witness was taken to the ultimate in that they were prepared to offer their lives as a seal on their witness to the One who gave His life for the, Jesus. St. Peter, hanging upside down on the Cross on the Vatican hill, from which his successors would guide, serve and rule the Universal Church.

St. Paul, outside the city, beheaded, as a generous consideration of his citizenship, where the little abbey of Tre Fontane (the three fountains) now nestles in the unlikely suburb of EUR.

The other thing they have in common, which led directly to this extreme witness, is a heart of love for Jesus. It is the same love that sustained Our Lady through the ostracism, discomfort, flight, years as a refugee, the hidden years, the tumultuous years of Jesus ministry, the love that saw her at the foot of the Cross and at the Pentecost.

It is the same love that alone will sustain all true Christian witness down the millennia. It is the engine that fires the heroic witness of the persecuted church in our time. That love comes from the primary declaration that we hear St. Peter give in the shadow of that great rock outcrop above Caesarea Philippi.

Other people may see Jesus as a good man, even a prophet but the professing Christian knows, beyond peradventure, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

It is no different today. The same question returns to everyman. 'Who do you say that Jesus is?' Upon the answer to that question will depend not only how we spend the rest of our lives but how we will spend eternity. It is in answering this question with his life that Paul can, from his prison cell, approach death with complete trust and reconciliation. '*The time has come*', he writes to Timothy, '*for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end. I have run the race to the finish. I have kept the Faith. I have proclaimed his message. He will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom.*'

Will we have that confidence on our death beds?

Will we be able to say that we have acknowledged Jesus in our words and by our lives?

Will we go to our graves knowing that we too have proclaimed the Gospel and led the lost home to Jesus?

It is unlikely that any of us will be called to the magnitude of the ministry of Peter or Paul BUT.....**our task is no different.**

The calendar of saints is not put there to intimidate us but to encourage us. These were ordinary men made extraordinary by God's grace and their faithful response, their hearts in tune with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We are put where God wants us to be, to work with fellow disciples, often not of our choosing, for the building up of the kingdom, for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls.

If we truly love Jesus what else would we want to be doing?

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