



Solemnity of Sts Peter & Paul 2026 Rome - A Personal Testimony

By Fr Robbie Low

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

Let me be clear at the outset. When preaching duties are allocated, there is no discussion, comparison, collusion or collaboration among us. So, when Raf preached his very moving testimony of his decisive moment in St Peter's, here last week, I was taken aback – not simply by its moving beauty but because I had coincidentally intended to speak of my own life-changing experience in this self-same basilica. Some of you will be familiar with the outline story. Bear with me because many of you will not even know that I was an Anglican minister for twenty five years.

Rafael was a Catholic brought up with a divine jolt to go deeper. I was a convert brought into the Communion of the Universal Church. Same place. Same shrine. Same Saint – Peter, whom, with St. Paul, we celebrate today

Twenty five years ago Sara persuaded me to go on a brief city break holiday to the Eternal City. Those of you who have been there know that, for anyone with the slightest spiritual sensitivity, you are rapidly transformed from tourist into pilgrim. Rome brings you to your knees.

You need to know that, although increasingly unhappy with the heterodox direction of the Anglican Church which we then served, we loved our parish, itself dedicated to St Peter, where we had served for

fifteen years and, for my part at least, had no intention of ever becoming a Catholic.

So it was that we joined the chaotic throng that churns through the great basilica of St Peter's, whirring selfie - cameras on sticks and 'record' button permanently on. Few, if any, seemed to be praying.

The shrine of St Peter is downstairs via an obscure door that you have to know about or just follow the mob. We took our place in the noisy and irreverent queue. When we finally emerged before the glass screen – St Peter is buried behind this and directly under the present high altar – the noise of the scrum was ridiculous.

Assuming, as I always have in holy places, that you get one shot at this and probably will never return, I knelt to pray. This, of itself, I have discovered, quietens the braying mob and tacitly gives permission for other, more shy pilgrims, to do the same.

What happened next was the beginning of the process that brought me here. How long I knelt before the shrine I couldn't have told you but Sara says about fifteen minutes. Time and its constraints and the noise of the busy world retreated and I found myself listening to the voice I had first heard many years before in my initial call to ministry, speaking as clearly as I am speaking to you now. I had so many questions that had piled up over the years of what the Scripture describes as the 'thin silence' before the 'still small voice' is heard. The Lord has His own agenda and timing and our little questionings are but a small part of the enigma of the eternal.

In those fifteen minutes I was given a torrent of information, much of which has guided and underpinned my preaching and teaching to this day – and given me a little understanding of some of the manifold crises that have and are afflicting the Church and the World.

But for me, most immediately, I was given a clear instruction to 'resign from the Church of England, go home and wait on God.'

This ought to have been deeply shocking but it was, on the contrary, quietly reassuring. I felt a sudden peace.

How would I know when to do this?

Well...there would be four clear signs. I assessed them later, and in prayer with Sara as respectively...

One could happen at any time.

The second was possible within a year.

The third was very unlikely and, if true, at least several years down the road.

The fourth was, frankly, not foreseeably possible.

Was God playing games with me?

I returned to my parish.

I told my spiritual director what had happened.

I told my Cell group, the five priest friends of the previous twenty five years, which met regularly and held each other in prayer daily.

I also told my children.

All were asked to treat this as strictly confidential and pray for discernment. Was this of God or merely a sign of either serious mental health issues or spiritual hubris?

The upshot was twofold. First of all, every single person entrusted with the outline information, whether they personally approved or not, came back within six months with the same answer. It was genuine.

Compounding these conclusions was the astonishing fact that all four of the signs, even those being 'several years away' or 'not foreseeably possible' had come to pass within just twelve months.

I duly spoke to my lovely parishioners and then gave the bishop six months notice of my resignation and chose the date of my last Service as the Feast Day of SS Peter & Paul, Apostles. We had a marvellous farewell party for c.200 in the beautiful gardens of dear friends and our friend, the Orthodox Rabbi came.

On the Feast Day of St Thomas, July 3rd, waved off by our lovely parishioners of St Peter's, we set off for home, for our little house in Cornwall, still Anglicans and, in my case, now jobless and with absolutely no idea of what the future would hold or what the Lord had in mind. We were simply joyful to be on the next stage of the pilgrim way and waiting on His mercy and His providence.

I tell you these things, not as a form of self- advertisement but to reassure you of the all- seeing wisdom and care of God.

With Him nothing is coincidental. All is providential.

I tell you - To alert you anew to the real spiritual dynamic of the holy places, to quicken your interest in the oft forgotten or overlooked power of relics,

To remind you, in the times of the dark and uncertainty, of the beautiful and encouraging prayers of the saints and the joy to be had in their company.

What happened next and how and why I came to be standing here and why we have returned to Rome every year since, I will, with your consent, tell you when next I am scheduled to be here on Sunday 9th August.

In the meantime let us continue to pray for one another, for the successor of Peter and ask for the prayers of SS Peter and Paul as together we, in our time, seek to serve on the same great mission for the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

For He alone has both chosen us and called us every one.