



LIVING THE GOSPEL

Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles
June 29th 2025

Theme: "And so I say to you, you are Peter, upon this rock I will build my church."

Gathering Prayer

All: God, who on the Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul give us the noble and holy joy of this day, grant, we pray, that your Church may in all things follow the teaching of those through whom she received the beginnings of right religion. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Exploring the Word

Gospel Reading: Matt 16: 13-19

¹³ When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴ And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets'.

¹⁵ 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' ¹⁶ Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God'.

¹⁷ Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸ So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.

¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

Gospel Focus

Peter is such a fascinating character because his commitment to Jesus does not come all at once. Like most of us, his journey with Christ involves ups and downs, fits and starts. He recklessly drops his fishing career to follow Jesus. He answers this question about Jesus' identity correctly and becomes a leader among the apostles. Right after this episode, Jesus rebukes him for not wanting to accept the suffering and death of his Lord. He ends up denying Jesus, then responding again to his shoreline call after the resurrection. Whenever we stumble in our faithfulness, we might look to Peter as an example. In the end, his encounter with the Risen Christ enables him to replace cowardice with courage. He becomes a bold preacher of the divine work he has seen, insisting on bringing this message to the people who don't want to hear it. He will continue to do so through persecution and imprisonment, until finally he follows Jesus all the way to the cross.

Gospel Reflection

Central to today's gospel reading is the question from Jesus, "Who do you say I am?" How would we answer this same question? Maybe we'd respond like the "some" referenced by the apostles-Jesus is a nice guy, a good moral teacher, someone who tells us all to get along. Alternatively, maybe we would repeat something formulaic from the Catechism or a theology textbook-Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity, two natures in one person, and so on. Peter finds that Jesus is not satisfied with such an answer from others. Jesus probes further-who am I *to you*? Peter knows his response. "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." A bold claim, and one that will have consequence for the rest of his life.

Today is a solemnity because of the significance of Peter and Paul, two of the most important figures in the early church. Who could have guessed that a Galilean fisherman and A Pharisee from Tarsus could change the course of world history? Together, these great saints root the church firmly in the city of Rome-both ministered and were killed there-and are inseparable as leaders in the early church. They are also demonstrably proof that God qualifies the called rather than the other way around. Even as Peter professes Jesus to be Christ, his faith is by no means perfect-immediately following the gospel passage today, Peter is rebuked by Jesus for his inability to comprehend Jesus' prediction of his own death. Peter famously denied three times after the Last Supper. However, we do not remember Peter primarily for his faults-we remember him for his response to Jesus' call. After the resurrection and the descend of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter is so emboldened to proclaim Christ crucified and risen such that he is ultimately martyred for his faith-according to tradition, upside down, feeling unworthy to be killed the same manner as Jesus. Peter lived and died in response to his claim in today's gospel-that Jesus is the Son of God.

When we first met Saul of Tarsus, he is depicted as "trying to destroy the church" (Acts 8:3) and is forcibly sending Christians to imprisonment. In a drastic transformation, Saul is knocked off his horse by the surprise of encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (this conversion is celebrated at his own feast). In this moment, Paul recognizes who Jesus is, and this relationship upends his whole life. Following this experience, and given a new name, Paul repurposes the fervor he had for persecuting Christians to spreading the gospel to the Gentiles. Like Peter, Paul is also martyred for his faith, witnessing in death to the same Christ he had witnessed to in his life and writings.

Are we willing to let an encounter with Jesus Christ transform our own lives, regardless of where that leads us? Whether our own journey of faith is something like Peter's, like Paul's, or something uniquely our own, we can take consolation knowing that God chooses to love us and call us for mission as well. In celebrating today's feast, we honor two people who lived in service of Christ and his church, and we ask for their intercession in living lives fully committed to the gospel.

Old/New Testament and CCC links

First Reading - Acts 12: 1-11

¹ It was about this time that King Herod started persecuting certain members of the Church. ² He beheaded James the brother of John, ³ and when he saw that this pleased the Jews he decided to arrest Peter as well.

⁴ This was during the days of Unleavened Bread, and he put Peter in prison, assigning four squads of four soldiers each to guard him in turns. Herod meant to try Peter in public after the end of Passover week. ⁵ All the time Peter was under guard the Church prayed to God for him unremittently.

⁶ On the night before Herod was to try him, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with double chains, while guards kept watch at the main entrance to the prison. ⁷ Then suddenly the angel of the Lord stood there, and the cell was filled with light. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him. 'Get up!' he said 'Hurry!' – and the chains fell from his hands. ⁸ The angel then said, 'Put on your belt and sandals'. After he had done this, the angel next said, 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me'. ⁹ Peter followed him, but had no idea that what the angel did was all happening in reality; he thought he was seeing a vision.

¹⁰ They passed through two guard posts one after the other, and reached the iron gate leading to the city. This opened of its own accord; they went through it and had walked the whole length of one street when suddenly the angel left him.

¹¹ It was only then that Peter came to himself. 'Now I know it is all true' he said. The Lord really did send his angel and has saved me from Herod and from all that the Jewish people were so certain would happen to me.'

Responsorial Reading - Ps 34:2-3,4-5,6-7, 8-9

R: The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him. (R)

My soul glories in Yahweh, let the humble hear and rejoice. Proclaim with me the greatness of Yahweh, together let us extol his name. **(R)**

I seek Yahweh, and he answers me and frees me from all my fears. Every face turned to him grows brighter and is never ashamed. **(R)**

A cry goes up from the poor man, and Yahweh hears, and helps him in all his troubles. The angel of Yahweh pitches camp round those who fear him; and he keeps them safe. **(R)**

How good Yahweh is – only taste and see! Happy the man who takes shelter in him. Fear Yahweh, you his holy ones: those who fear him want for nothing. **(R)**

Second Reading – 2 Tim 4: 6-8, 17-18

⁶ As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone.

⁷ I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith;

⁸ all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his Appearing.

¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the whole message might be proclaimed for all the pagans to hear; and so I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever.

Sharing and Discussion

1. Have you ever felt a deep conviction or realization about who Jesus is to you? What was that like?
2. Have you felt called to speak or act with faith, even if others around you saw things differently? What helps you find that courage?
3. What was Jesus' reason for asking, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" What about you? Are you concerned about what others think of you? And for what reason?

Closing Prayer

All: Lord God, grant us the courage to always proclaim your glory and fill us with the strength to be your servants in the church and for the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.