

**The Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles. Readings Year C: Acts 12:1-11, 2Tim 4:6-8,17-18 & Mt 16:13-19                      Theme: "BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM ?"**

On this day that we celebrate the solemnity of the martyrdom of these great pillars of the Church, let us also thank God for their profound faith and fidelity to Jesus Christ and the mission he commissioned them for.

Peter, as we know, was a professional fisherman from Bethsaida, a fishing town on the Lake of Galilee. It was his brother Andrew who introduced him to Jesus Christ. Jesus changed his name from Simon to Cephas or Peter and made him the leader of his apostles and his future church. Peter wrote two epistles that addressed the church. He was martyred by emperor Nero in Rome by crucifixion with his head upside down. It was a request Peter made as he felt he was unworthy to die like his divine Master Jesus Christ.

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the greatest missionary and evangelist, was a Roman citizen by birth as he was born in Tarsus, present-day Turkey in Cilicia, a Province of Rome. He was a professional tentmaker and a great Scripture scholar. As we all know well, he was converted to Christianity on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians who fled from persecutions. Saul, who became Paul, wrote 14 epistles and founded many churches. Because he was a citizen of Rome, he was not crucified but beheaded in Rome.

Both of these great apostles were arrested, persecuted, but they held on to their faith in Christ and died for him and his Church. Although they have a different personalities, they worked well together to build God's kingdom, all for the better glory of God. They are great models for us all.

In the first reading, we heard how the Christian faithful prayed to God for Peter who was put in jail by King Herod for preaching the Good News of Christ and how God liberated him. For Peter, his liberation from jail was like a dream. Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles we just heard that when Peter recovered his senses, he said: "Now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from the all the Jewish people had been expecting." My dear people of God, when you put your total trust and faith in God, he will not let you down. We serve a dependable and reliable God!

Today's second reading is a well-known passage often used at funerals. Paul, who is in jail because of his fidelity to Christ and his mission, sees his death through martyrdom to be imminent. He uses sports and military metaphors to describe the success of his missionary life/work and is ready to die for Christ. If he has done well, he attributes it to Jesus Christ, the source of his life, and now looks forward to meeting Jesus in heaven.

Let us hope and pray that when our end comes, we will also say/pray like Paul: "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith, from now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance."

The Gospel reading is the first of the three times when Jesus foretold of his passion, death, and resurrection. You will find this in all the Synoptic Gospels : Mt 16: 13-19, Mk 8:27-29, and LK 9:18-20. St Mathew tells us when Jesus and his disciples arrived in the region of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus wants to know from his disciples what others are saying who he the Son of Man is. As you heard in the reading, some people identified Jesus with John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He turned to his disciples to find what they are saying about him. Since he was about to leave this world, Jesus wanted his disciples to know his identity and his mission in this world. They can only be successful in carrying on his mission if they know him and the mission he will assign to them. Peter got the answer right: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew tells us Peter got the correct answer because it was revealed to him by God. Peter made this profound confession of faith in Jesus, and he became a spokesman for his colleagues and the leader of the future Church of Christ.

Fellow parishioners, Jesus Christ continues to ask the same question he posed to his disciples to us also: "But who do you say that I am?" Jesus wants your personal knowledge of him, not only what your parents, teachers, or books taught you. As you know well, a secondhand faith is not a strong faith. Having personal knowledge of Jesus which includes both intellectual and experiential knowledge will strengthen your faith to survive any storms of life.

My dear ones, on this day as we honor these great pillars of the Church, let us also pray for our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, the chief shepherd of the church of Christ. We're blessed to have him. Let us also pray for the Most Rev. Mark Brennan, our own bishop, all bishops, and all the leaders of our church that God will continue to guide and bless them as they lead the Church that His beloved Son Jesus Christ has founded.

As I have been saying, please be careful with the heat wave. Do not come to Mass if your health will not allow you to withstand the heat wave, please. Wishing you all a blessed summer. Again, let us remember that Jesus is asking you today: "BUT WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?" May holy Mother Mary and her beloved husband, St Joseph, pray for us as we continue to know their beloved son, Jesus Christ, and making him known to the world. Amen!