

Homily, 28 June 2014

Vigil Mass: Solemnity of Saints Peter & Paul, Apostles

Acts 3:1-10; Psalm 19:2-3,4-5; Galatians 1:11-20; John 21:15-19



Whenever I am in Los Angeles, which I was last weekend, I try to attend mass at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. It is, for me, a pilgrimage of sorts.

The Cathedral's architecture is modern, and yet the atmosphere is quiet and majestic. It is a holy space. If you are there with others, you keep your voices hushed. Intuitively you whisper, if you speak at all.

Lining the walls on both sides of the Cathedral's central nave, are twenty-five large tapestries each bearing a small group of people. They are woven in muted tones. The color and texture of the fabric blends into the stone of the Cathedral. Most of the people are in robes, some in habits or cassocks, a few in dresses or shirts and trousers.

They represent the Communion of Saints: one hundred and thirty-six Saints and Blesseds standing in prayerful adoration, facing the altar in communion with all the faithful gathered for the mass.

In among the named Saints are a dozen anonymous figures: some adults, some children and teenagers in tennis shoes. They represent all the unnamed Saints and those yet unknown who live among us. Future saints, whose stories are still incomplete.

Standing in fore, on the first tapestry closest to the altar, are Peter and Paul.



They are pictured together as they so often are, not because they were martyred together on the same day, but because they were one in faith and the two great apostles of the newborn Church.

They were united by their love of Christ who gave each one their mission: Peter to the circumcised – to the Jews – and Paul to the

uncircumcised – to the Gentiles. These two knew each other, of course, and I am sure they loved and respected each other as well.

Yet they were so different that I can't help wondering if they actually liked each other. We know from scripture that they argued: Paul tells us that he forcefully confronted Peter with his inconsistent behavior toward the Gentiles.

Their relationship, tells us so much about the nature of Church and what unites us despite all our differences.



Peter was a fisherman and I suspect he was a natural leader: older, experienced, someone that the other men respected. He was probably a devout Jew, but no scholar of the law. And he seems to have been intelligent and insightful, at least in his perception of others.

Encountering Jesus for the first time he fell at his knees and said, *"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."* Peter's faith came from his love and reverence for Jesus the Christ.

Simon Peter answered Jesus, *"Lord, you know that I love you."*
Jesus said to him, *"Tend my sheep."*

And so he did, carrying on the work that Jesus had given to him: teaching, healing, baptizing, leading.

Saying to a man crippled from birth: *"... what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk."*



Paul, on the other hand, was a highly educated young Pharisee, zealous for his ancestral traditions. His faith seems to have been intellectual and ritualized: the Law for it's own sake. It mattered more to him than did his own people.

Because the Jews who followed Jesus seemed to undermine the Law, Paul said *"I persecuted the Church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it."* His faith was anything but relational.

And then one day he encountered Christ: “... *I died to the law,*” he writes further on in his letter to the Galatians, “*that I might live for God. ... I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me.*”

The transformation of Paul’s faith from an impersonal adherence to the law to a personal relationship with Jesus the Son of God, was so radical that he fled into Arabia, to find the time and space to make sense of it all.

It was there that he began the work given to him by the Lord:

“The Gospel preached by me ... came through a revelation of Jesus Christ ... so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, ...”



Twelve anonymous figures stand among the Saints on the tapestries of the L.A. Cathedral. They stand for us, reminders that what unites us to Peter, Paul, and all the Saints, is neither our heroic deeds nor our great sacrifices, but our love for God, for Jesus Christ, and for our neighbor.

It is love that compels us to discipleship: responding to God’s grace, keeping Christ’s commandments, doing works of mercy, glorifying the Lord by our lives.

But what exactly are we supposed to do?

We have been told by the bishops that in the ordinary circumstances of our lives we must be like leaven in dough: working quietly from within for the sanctification of the world and making Christ known to others.

So I can’t tell you what to do: I don’t live in your circumstances. You’ll have to pray about it and perhaps seek out some spiritual guidance.

But how to do to what you need to do ... that’s another matter.

Think of Paul: if you act without love, you may destroy the very thing that matters most. So be courageous, even in little things, but always act out of love and for the good of others.

That is the lesson and the example of Peter, Paul, and all the Saints.