

SOLEMNITY OF ST. PETER & ST. PAUL; June 29th 2025; Cycle C
Acts 12: 1-11; 2Tim. 4: 6-8, 17-18; Mt. 16: 13-19

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Today we remember the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul, the two great pillars of the early Church. Though every year the Feast falls on June 29th it is not common to see it commencing on Sunday. Probably we will have to wait another 6 years to celebrate this feast on another Sunday. In the four gospels, Peter is pictured as a leader and we are given his nature and personality. Of course, to know about St. Paul we need to rely mainly on the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Paul. At the same time nobody knows exactly how and when these great men were martyred. It is believed that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome in A.D. 64 and A.D. 67 respectively. We may not find many things in common with Peter and Paul other than, their zeal for the gospel and Jesus.

Peter was a fisherman, one of the first ones to be chosen by Jesus as his disciple. As a fisherman, probably, he was illiterate and ignorant of Mosaic Law and Scripture. But Jesus chose him to be the leader of the Apostolic College and the first Pope to lead his Church. Peter was an ordinary human being with lots of ups and downs in his journey of faith. He always tried to be bold and faithful to Jesus. On the other hand, we see him stumbling at the critical moment. He declared at the Last Supper that he would not leave Jesus and would stand with him even at the cost of his life. In fact, he was the first one to deny Jesus, being afraid of the question of a servant girl. He wanted to be ever faithful to his master after repenting over his infidelity. But according to John 21, he is the one who took initiative to go back to the old trade of fishing and six others joined him. Here again, Jesus had to call him back. Despite of Peter's failure and weakness, Jesus never hesitated to appoint him to be the head of his Church.

Paul, on the other hand, was well educated and a fanatic Pharisee, well-versed in Scripture and Mosaic Law. Of course, he never had a chance to meet Jesus personally and listen to him. But his call came with a shocking context. It came through the dramatic event that took place on his way to Damascus with the intention of persecuting Christians there. Once, called and chosen by Jesus, Paul never turned back. But he had his frustrations and struggles with Peter over the issues of the conversion and acceptance of gentiles in to the Church. In the beginning of the missionary expedition Paul was upset over the attitudes of Barnabas and Mark. For time being they were separated, but reunited later. Almost half of the book of the Acts of the Apostles is dedicated to Paul's conversion and missionary work among the gentiles. Besides that, out of 27 Books in New Testament 13 are attributed to Paul, which he wrote in the forms of letters to various Churches. Paul's greatness lies in his passion for the Good News about Jesus and his

desire to share it.

Jesus didn't choose Peter for his extraordinary qualities or talents; rather for his willingness to co-operate with the plan of Jesus. At Caesarea Philippi Jesus Instituted the Church on Peter the great rock and promised him that the gates of the nether world shall not prevail against it (Mt. 16:18-20). If we go through the history of the Church, it is true that the Church prevailed against many adverse situations down the centuries through the divine intervention. But this promise of Jesus is not a free pass for the leaders and members to sit and relax leaving the Church to the divine protection alone. The Apostles, the Fathers and early Christians defended the Church from the enemies even sacrificing their own lives. All the Apostles, except St. John, became martyrs for defending the faith.

Of course, we may conclude that St. Peter and St. Paul are too high for us to imitate. But we should not forget that they were ordinary human beings as we are. They became great because Jesus had chosen them to work for him. Perhaps, we are not called by Jesus in a dramatic situation. In fact we too are called to be the disciples of Jesus on the very day of our baptism. It is the duty of each generation to build up and protect the Church. Today this duty is entrusted to us. It is our sacred mission to defend the faith and hand it over to the next generation. *If the Church has been shrinking for the last few centuries, the cause is very simple that the people of the particular generations didn't do their contribution to build up the Church.*

The task we have to do today can be done only by us. So, let us, first of all, practice our faith and defend it. Together with that let us stand to protect the Church from the bad media and ungodly people. These days, among the other religious people, perhaps, Christians are the most indifferent people in protecting their Church. The situations have reached in such a way that in the modern age any one can throw dirt on the Church and Jesus. No one is there to raise the voice and defend the Church. The Christians justify their indifference under the pretext of tolerance and patience. But where we have to raise our voice, we have to; where we have to act we have to act. Defending our faith and Church is not against tolerance. In a way, today the Christians are the worst enemies of Jesus and his Church.