

St Peter and St Paul 2019

On June 29 the Church celebrates the feast day of St. Peter & Paul. As early as the year 258, there is evidence of an already lengthy tradition of celebrating the solemnities of both Saint Peter and Saint Paul on the same day. Together, the two saints are the founders of the See of Rome, through their preaching, ministry and martyrdom there.

Peter, who was named Simon, was a fisherman of Galilee and was introduced to the Lord Jesus by his brother Andrew, also a fisherman. Jesus gave him the name Cephas (Petrus in Latin), which means 'Rock,' because he was to become the rock upon which Christ would build His Church.

Peter was a bold follower of the Lord. He was the first to recognize that Jesus was "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," and eagerly pledged his fidelity until death. In his boldness, he also made many mistakes, however, such as losing faith when walking on water with Christ and betraying the Lord on the night of His passion.

Yet despite his human weaknesses, Peter was chosen to shepherd God's flock. The Acts of the Apostles illustrates his role as head of the Church after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. Peter led the Apostles as the first Pope and ensured that the disciples kept the true faith.

St. Peter spent his last years in Rome, leading the Church through persecution and eventually being martyred in the year 64. He was crucified upside-down at his own request, because he claimed he was not worthy to die as his Lord.

He was buried on Vatican hill, and St. Peter's Basilica is built over his tomb.

St. Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles. His letters are included in the writings of the New Testament, and through them we learn much about his life and the faith of the early Church.

Before receiving the name Paul, he was Saul, a Jewish pharisee who zealously persecuted Christians in Jerusalem. Scripture records that Saul was present at the martyrdom of St. Stephen.

Saul's conversion took place as he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christian community there. As he was traveling along the road, he was suddenly surrounded by a great light from heaven. He was blinded and fell off

his horse. He then heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He answered: "Who are you, Lord?" Christ said: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Saul continued to Damascus, where he was baptized and his sight was restored. He took the name Paul and spent the remainder of his life preaching the Gospel tirelessly to the Gentiles of the Mediterranean world.

Paul was imprisoned and taken to Rome, where he was beheaded in the year 67.

He is buried in Rome in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

In a sermon in the year 395, St. Augustine of Hippo said of St. Peter and Paul: "Both apostles share the same feast day, for these two were one; and even though they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, and Paul followed. And so we celebrate this day made holy for us by the apostles' blood. Let us embrace what they believed, their life, their labours, their sufferings, their preaching, and their confession of faith."

Pope Francis centred his sermon on the episode of St. Peter in Matthew's Gospel where he confesses his faith in Jesus saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Pope said Peter had seen how Jesus "anointed" His people with hope, walking from village to village with the sole aim of saving and helping those considered lost – the dead, the sick, the wounded and the repentant.

The Pope said that "God's Anointed One kept bringing the Father's love and mercy to the very end." "This merciful love," he said, "demands that we too go forth to every corner of life, to reach out to everyone, even though this may cost us our "good name", our comforts, our status... even martyrdom."

The Pope pointed out that when Peter couldn't accept that Jesus should die, he becomes the Lord's enemy and a "stumbling stone in the Messiah's path". Peter's life and confession of faith, the Holy Father said, "also means learning to recognize the temptations that will accompany the life of every disciple."

Like Peter, the Pope said, we will always be tempted to hear those "whisperings" of the evil One, which will become a stumbling stone for the mission. The devil, he explained, seduces with "whispering" from hiding,

because like a hypocrite he wants to stay hidden and not be discovered. I was called a hypocrite recently and it really hurt.

Sharing in Christ's anointing, also means sharing in his glory, which is his cross. "In Jesus," the Pope said, "glory and the cross go together; they are inseparable.

The Pope explained that that once we turn our back on the cross, even though we may attain the heights of glory, we will be fooling ourselves, since it will not be God's glory, but the snare of the enemy.

He pointed out that we often feel the temptation to be Christians by keeping a prudent distance from the Lord's wounds. Jesus touches human misery and he asks us to join him in touching the suffering flesh of others.

"To proclaim our faith with our lips and our heart," the Pope said, "demands that we – like Peter – learn to recognize the "whisperings" of the evil one, those personal and local "pretexts" that keep us far from real human dramas, that preserve us from contact with other people's concrete existence and, in the end, from knowing the revolutionary power of God's tender love."

Yesterday in Guildford Cathedral 11 were ordained priest and 18 deacons this morning, continuing the tradition of the Church of England ordaining on the occasion of the Feast of St Peter and St Paul. So we are reminded how significant this festival is to the whole Christian church.

Amen.