

## SOLEMN FEAST OF SS PETER & PAUL

*You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church*

*I [Paul] have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith*

Each year the Church celebrates a Solemn Feast in honour of the two principal Apostles, Saints Peter & Paul, and of course in Newport it is also the patronal feast of both the Church and parish school. In Rome, as one might expect, this annual feast has the greatest significance on account of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul there, and the fact that the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, is the successor of St. Peter. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, but it is upon the witness of Peter and the Apostles that our Lord has built his Church and guaranteed that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Today, we honour these two outstanding Apostles and ask for their powerful intercession for the Church and the World, whilst at the same time learning from their lives and being inspired by them.

When we consider the choice that Jesus made of Peter and Paul for the vocation entrusted to them, both may strike us as not being obvious candidates and that the choice was unusual, and even involved a risk. In an age which takes great care and effort in making appointments, according to a due process with the close examination of a personal CV and recommendations, one surmises that even a Church panel for ministerial selection would not have chosen Peter and Paul for senior roles in the Church.

It was after praying all night that Jesus made the choice of his Apostles and amongst them was a fisherman who bore the name Simon. Our Lord knew the character of those whom he called and, as we know from the Gospels, the weakness and impetuosity of Simon is not disguised. Jesus even rebuked him for his lack of faith and for

thinking as man thinks and not as God would have us think. Simon even betrayed Our Lord in his hour of need. And yet this is the man of whom Jesus says,

***You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church***

Jesus saw the potential in St. Peter, and also recognised the faith and love that was within him. Our Lord gave Simon a new name, the name Cephas which in Greek is Petros meaning rock. As St. Paul teaches us, God chooses the weak and makes them strong to fulfil the mission entrusted to them. This gives us great confidence in the power of God's grace to do what we cannot do by ourselves.

In the Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see Peter in prison and in chains and then delivered from his captivity by an Angel. Whatever his personal weaknesses and defects, God worked through Peter, as he does both you and me, when we have faith and trust. Peter ran away on the occasion Jesus needed him most, but ran to the tomb upon hearing report of the Resurrection. As followers of Jesus, sometimes we run away, or turn off, or become unreliable in our commitment. Upon recognising our weaknesses, the response should be like that of Peter, to repent and, as St. Paul says in the Letter to Timothy, to run the race to the finish.

The story of Paul's Damascus road conversion from being a persecutor of the early Church to being the outstanding missionary Apostle, is well known. Again, an unusual choice on Jesus' part, and yet how indebted the Church is to Paul for his ceaseless labours and the true Christian teaching bequeathed to the Christian community which we read in his Letters at mass throughout the year.

Paul commences his Letter to the Galatians with the words,

*The Good News I preached is not a human message*

Filled with the Holy Spirit, but living within the limits of human weakness as earthenware vessels which contain the God's grace,

Peter and Paul proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world and established the Church at its beginning. The message and the work were not their own but God's plan in which we are all called to participate. Both Apostles sealed in their own blood witness to Christ as martyrs in Rome and are praised throughout the world this day.

Saints Peter and Paul, pray for us and for our parishes on this patronal feast.

Fr Anthony