

## SERMON : FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

MAY the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. <Amen>

### THE FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

Today is the closest Sunday to the feast day of our parish patronal saints, Peter and Paul

Not really a sermon today, more a series of thoughts and reflections having read and prayed upon the gospel, Matthew 16:13-19, "Peter's Declaration About Jesus".

Did Jesus choose Peter for his strengths or for his weaknesses? How can I apply this question to myself and the ministry that I have been given?

The Church is the assembly of the people of God. Do I talk to God frequently enough about my relationship with His Church?

A name is not an optional extra in life. Naming people has been a feature of the Scriptures from the Garden of Eden to the book of Revelation. Mary was told to call her Son, Jesus, a name meaning "God saves". Simon was re-named Peter, meaning Rock because he was called to be the earthly foundation stone of the Church. Each of us is called to be a foundation stone for the up building of the lives of those around us. St John tells us in Revelation (3:12) that each of us will receive a new name when we reach heaven. Am I doing all that I can to prepare myself, here on earth, to receive joyfully my mysterious new name.

**"But who do you say that I am?"** Suppose that Jesus put His question to me in my prayer today, what would I answer?

Let me be honest with him, no matter if I feel ashamed of what I come up with. Jesus reads my heart long before I speak. Perhaps he then invites me to chat with Peter, who got the formula right in this scene, but in yesterday's gospel tries to argue Jesus out of his passion, making Jesus so angry as to call him 'Satan'. Peter also in a little while will deny that he even knows Jesus!

But, Lord, let me see that Peter's weakness is the making of him: he finally learns not to trust in himself but in you alone. After the resurrection when you question him again, he is honest in saying, 'You know I love you'. And that is enough. Let him teach me to learn your forgiving love through my weaknesses, and let me love you ever more deeply.

A rock in the middle of a stream is something that you put your foot on: a sure footing, something you can depend on, that will ensure a safe crossing, no injury and you are ultimately ... safe.

What a shaky rock Peter turned out to be: three denials; dispute with Saint Paul over admitting gentiles to the community leading to the Council of Jerusalem. Yet Jesus gives him everything. May I never under-estimate what Jesus has planned for the 'shakiest' of individuals, rather - may I always be willing to help.

Then, Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah. Peter has finally “got it”, he’s caught on to who Jesus is, and Jesus blesses him. But this is not the end of the journey, because when under pressure in the Passion he denies that he even knows Jesus. Peter however enters into a new depth of relationship with Jesus when he admits his weakness: he knows he can no longer trust himself but must depend totally on Jesus. And this is enough for him to later be told, ‘Feed my lambs and sheep’ (John 21:15-17). May I always trust in The Lord and in Him alone.

How better can I affirm, with love, Peter’s declaration of faith in Jesus, not just as Messiah, but as the Son of God?

Am I weak enough to be a priest?’ <PAUSE> I mean by that, I am aware of my frailty and my need to become a man of prayer and live out my ministry in trust and total dependence on God?

St Peter and St Paul are often described as the 'columns of the faith': Peter was the rock upon which the Church was built, and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, especially chosen by Christ to carry the Good News to those who were not Jews. Today, as we celebrate their feast, I reflect on my faith, especially that it is a great gift from God, which I received when I was baptised, and in which I grew through the ministry of so many others: starting from the apostles, down to my parents, teachers, pastors, parish community, friends, and so many other witnesses. I thank God for this great gift, and ask for the ability to know how to transmit it to others, not as a museum piece but as a living reality.

I also reflect in gratitude that I am not called to live this alone, but with others, in the community we call the Church. I talk with Jesus on my membership in the Church, and ask him to help me be a living stone in this his house. May this house be open to all men and women at all times.

**OUR FAITH** requires that we give a personal answer to the question as to who Jesus (the Son of Man) is. It is not enough to quote the Creeds or the views of one or other theologian. "But who do you say that I am?"

Try to answer not only from the head but from the heart. You might helpfully rephrase the question as: "Who is Jesus for me?" The answer can only be given in prayer.

I runga e te Ingoa o te Atua, te Matua, te Tama me te Wairua Tapu.  
In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit <AMINE>