

Sunday Q&A

Your Faith in Focus



THE SHAPING OF THE CHURCH

Who were Saints Peter and Paul, and what do they have to do with us now?

This is a special day where we pay homage to two of the Church's early leaders. Peter is often depicted holding the keys to our Church, while Paul holds a sword. Who were these men of God, and what does their mission have to do with us today?

Pillars of Our Faith

Christian devotion to Saints Peter and Paul has a most ancient origin. The special Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul has always been celebrated in Rome, at least since the reign of the emperor Constantine. Some Roman catacombs from this time period possess graffiti requesting the intercession of these great saints. One scribbled inscription reads, "Paul and Peter, make intercession for Victor." Every June 29, Catholics around the world also ask for the intercession of these saints before our Lord's throne.

As many great saints do, these apostles have nicknames. St. Peter is often called the "Prince of the Apostles," whereas St. Paul is typically known as the "Apostle to the Gentiles." Even though we celebrate the lives and contributions of both men on the same day, they played different roles in the life of the early Church.

Prince of the Apostles

Simon Peter was "the rock" upon whom Christ founded his Church. While he preached the Gospel to many different peoples, as St. Paul did, his main role in the life of the Church was an ecclesial one. As the first pope, it is fitting that St. Peter is called the "Prince of the Apostles." He is not a prince like a prince is in England. The word "prince" comes from the Latin *princeps*, meaning "supreme head" or "ruler." As Christ's Vicar on earth, St. Peter and his successors have been given temporal authority and the power to "bind and loose," as our Lord said (Matthew 16:19). We see this with St. Peter presiding over the Council of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles.

Apostle to the Gentiles

St. Paul traveled a bit more than St. Peter. Look inside almost any Bible from the middle of the twentieth century, and you'll often find a map detailing St. Paul's travels from Corinth to Galatia. Because he made so many contacts, it's fitting that we commemorate him as the "Apostle to the Gentiles." Keep in mind that it was also St. Paul who rebuked St. Peter during the controversy stemming from whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised. Whenever one reads any letter by St. Paul, it is clear he is driving home the point that salvation comes through Jesus Christ, not through the works of the Torah.

The Magisterium and the Mission

The beauty of this special solemnity is that we focus on two specific roles of the Church. One is to govern. That is why we have the Magisterium: It ensures us that we are living in God’s truth. When all the bishops are united with the pope, we can be assured that a certain teaching is true. We were promised this certitude by Jesus himself before he ascended into heaven. This is embodied in St. Peter, and it is comforting to know that no matter what, the gates of hell will never prevail against this Church that Jesus founded. It is continually the pillar and bulwark of truth.

The Church also is meant to go out to others. Since we are the Church, members of one Body with Christ as our Head, we have a duty to go out and spread the gospel message. We may not all have as much success as St. Paul did, but that doesn’t mean we have to stop trying. Don’t we live in

a world that has become largely “gentile”—that is, a world that really doesn’t know God much at all?

Our world is much like the one that Saints Peter and Paul lived in. There is a lot of work to do here in the twenty-first century in building the Kingdom of God. But it is not impossible. If these two great apostles could do so much on their own, just think what 200 or even 2,000 Catholics with a similar mindset could do!

Like St. Paul, we need to be apostles to the “gentiles” of our age; like St. Peter, we need to stand firmly on the “rock” of our salvation. We should learn from this week’s solemnity that it is our job as Catholics to do what St. Peter and St. Paul were called to do. If we haven’t really answered that call yet, now is a perfect time to resolve to do so.

Ponder and Pray

- How am I called to be a rock in my life and family?
- In my life, who am I called to share the Gospel with?

Make It Your Own

Pick a chapter in Scripture from one of St. Paul’s or St. Peter’s epistles, and read through it prayerfully. Then write about what God is saying to you today through their words, which were written so long ago.

Dive Deeper

To read the full article on Saints Peter and Paul, scan the code

or visit the URL:

<https://media.ascensionpress.com/2018/06/29/the-missions-of-sts-peter-and-paul-passed-on-to-us/>

