

Homily for SS Peter and Paul

A good friend of mine, Fr Joe Smith, often spoke of what he called 'angel stories' by which he meant incidents in our lives, which are often surprising but which bring us a sense of joy or relief, sometimes even a new beginning. We have such an angel story in our first reading today. The background is state persecution, the death of the apostle James by King Herod and now the imprisonment of Peter. Things looked bleak to say the least, bound hand and foot and heavily guarded Peter had an 'angel moment' though at the time he thought he was dreaming which brought about his release from prison, a welcome surprise for him and for those praying for him. We might ask ourselves if we have ever had an 'angel moment' have we thanked someone for being an angel.

The other person we are remembering today is Paul and in our second reading he is reflecting on his life which will soon come to an end. From being an ardent persecutor of the followers of Jesus, he experienced an utter change of life on the road to Damascus, and became the apostle to the gentiles, this despite the mistrust of those who could only remember his earlier career. When Paul talks about running the race to the finish we know what that has involved, namely faithfulness and integrity in the face of great opposition and not without much suffering. In all of this Paul speaks of God giving him the power to proclaim the good news, of God rescuing him from all the evil attempts on him.

In the gospel Peter takes centre stage. The place is Caesarea Philippi, noted for the number of shrines to different pagan gods. It is here that Jesus asks the disciples two questions. The first was easy to answer, notice they all chipped in here, easy because all they needed was a good memory and the ability to speak. Who do people say the Son of Man is? The answers come thick and fast, John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. What unites them is that they are all dead. The second of Jesus' questions was more difficult, Who do you say I am? We can imagine the silence, why, because this question isn't about reporting it is about understanding, and even more about commitment. It is Simon Peter who speaks, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus responds by calling him the rock on which he will build the Church, a Church which will withstand evil in all its many forms.

None of us are Peter or Paul but all of us at some time or other have to answer Jesus' question, who do you say I am? And the answer we give will help to shape the way we live. In his life Jesus identified with the poor, the marginalised, the infirm, the outcast and he criticised leaders who were on the make or who not only placed unnecessary burdens on people but did nothing to help them. Things aren't that different today. How we answer Jesus' question will determine whose side we are on, the powerful or the powerless; to whom we are 'angels' and who are 'angels' to us; whether or not we will run the race to the finish by absorbing the heart of the Gospel and speak out against injustice of any kind and reach out to those most in need.

Bidding Prayers for the Solemnity of SS Peter and Paul

Celebrant:

As we celebrate the feast day of St Peter and St Paul, apostles and martyrs, we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church founded by Christ and strengthened by the Spirit – that the Church will help all its members to be faithful to the Gospel.

Lord in your mercy

For leaders and Governments – that they will put aside personal ambition, act with justice and integrity, uphold the rights of all, allow freedom of speech and provide for all especially the most vulnerable.

Lord in your mercy

For all those affected by the pandemic, especially in those countries where medical provision is scarce – that richer nations will reach out with practical advice and care.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are suffering in any way, physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally – that they may experience an ‘angel moment’ in their lives and be renewed.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the Covid-19 virus, and Francis O’Gara, Elizabethh lally, Peter Bennison, Michael bernard Crewdson, Terry Whalley, Gerard Whalley, Gary Lynam and Sandra Muldoon whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

As we celebrate St Peter and St Paul, we ask their intercession to help us in our own day to proclaim the gospel by word and by action, so that God’s love may be seen and experienced in our world. Through Christ our Lord. Amen