

29 June

Today is a wonderful feast that honours two great leaders of the early Church; Peter, chief of the apostles and leader of the faith and Paul, great preacher and missionary to the nations. Each gave his life for Jesus and the Gospel by suffering a martyr's death, hence the red vestments that are seldom worn on Sundays. Each planted the seed of faith and gave witness by the shedding of their blood.

Great basilicas in Rome are dedicated to these characters, pictures and statues of them appear everywhere and they are seen as the two great pillars or foundation stones of the faith in early Rome. And while Peter & Paul are heroes of the faith, the importance of today's feast is the greatness that comes from human weakness. These men were chosen by Jesus despite their weakness in faith and transformed by God's grace. They are signs of grace and hope that comes to us in the Christian life. Peter called by Jesus to be the 'rock' of faith, so prominent in the scriptures, so often the one speaking out and taking the lead, is actually the one of very weak faith, who doubts the power and word of Jesus. Peter is the one who at the public trial of Jesus abandons the Master and three times denies that he knows him. Three times he was given the chance to change his story and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Jesus as a friend and disciple should, and three times he denied him. But this human weakness and fragility is transformed by God's grace. God breaks the heart of doubt and fills it with the grace of faith.

Paul made a career of going around persecuting Christians. For him, it was fun and entertainment. But Paul heard the voice of the risen Lord calling out to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' Paul underwent an intense conversion experience. He saw and experienced the light. From trying to kill off the power of God's word, Paul became its greatest proclaimer. He went tirelessly around the early Christian communities visiting them, encouraging them, endlessly preaching the word of God and writing some of Christian literature's best letters to the Romans, the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Thessalonians and the Colossians. Once again, weakness transformed by God's grace. Both these characters speak to us of what happens when God's grace takes over our lives and we give ourselves joyfully and lovingly to his service and the Gospel of the Jesus.

On Saturday morning, I was privileged to attend the ordinations at the cathedral of three new priests and a deacon, all of whom I have taught. These young men are giving their lives in service hopefully as Pope Francis demands; to be loving shepherds of God's people, to bring the healing grace of Christ to those who are lost and broken, to inspire young people to live the Gospel of Jesus by lives of justice and service of the poor, to show to all people the joy of humble service and to build up the community of faith. I'm sure there may be moments in life when these new priests may feel like Peter and Paul but God's grace will continually touch them and lead them forward in faith. We pray for Vinh, Michael, Matthew and Francis as they begin their lives of faithful ministry.

Today's readings speak to us about the joyful profession of faith. Faith is costly, faith is demanding, faith stretches us and takes us beyond ourselves. For some of the early saints like Peter and Paul, faith demanded that they suffer and die for Jesus. Today, around the world, missionaries continue to give their lives for the sake of the Gospel; there are many modern day martyrs in the Church. Even in death, the witness of their lives is simply extraordinary and we who enjoy great peace and prosperity in this country, need to value the gift of faith and the freedom that it brings. But we are still called to lives of service and ministry to the poor. On Friday morning for the feast of the Sacred Heart, both school communities of Holy Rosary and St Brendan's donated food and goods for the poor and needy; a gentle reminder to all of us about the gift of faith and the call to discipleship. We pray that Ss. Peter and Paul inspire us by their witness and lead us forward in faith with courage, patience and perseverance.