

- The Minor Festivals of the Church Year -

St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles - June 29th

June 29th is a public holiday in Rome. For the general public it means a day off of work, schools are closed, and most businesses close their doors. The day, in some parts of Italy, is also celebrated with music festivals, fairs, and fireworks. So why is this day so special in Rome? Because for Christians it is the Festival of St. Peter and St. Paul. In a sermon in the year 395, St. Augustine of Hippo said of St. Peter and St. Paul: “Both apostles share the same feast day, for these two were one; and even though they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, and Paul followed. And so we celebrate this day made holy for us by the apostles' blood. Let us embrace what they believed, their life, their labors, their sufferings, their preaching, and their confession of faith.” Both Peter and Paul suffered death at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero for their faith in Jesus. Peter was martyred first in 64 A.D. being crucified upside down. Paul followed by being beheaded in 67 A.D.

Even though both Peter and Paul were born Jews, their paths to faith in Jesus could not have been more different. Peter was an uneducated fisherman, Paul was a highly learned Pharisee. Peter had been with Jesus as the first of the disciples, Paul was converted by Christ as the last of the apostles. Two very different men, two very different backgrounds but the one commonality they shared was the power of the Holy Spirit who brought them to faith in Jesus, the only God and Savior. These two apostles represent the unity of the New Testament Church. Through their efforts and preaching the gospel would go out into all the world bringing believers under the one banner of salvation that is Christ our Lord.

Both being Jews from birth they were taught the law of God. Not only did they know the letter of the law, but they also personally knew their sins before the law of God. Peter was the one who had denied his Lord 3 times before Jesus was crucified, and then immediately going outside he wept bitterly. Paul was the once great persecutor of Christians and self-proclaimed destroyer of God's Church, who after his conversion called himself the worst of sinners. BUT... both had come to know the unfathomable depths of God's mercy and grace, that if God could save such wretches as themselves, then Christ's forgiveness is for all. These 2 apostles would then dedicate their life to upholding the name of Jesus in the hope of bringing others to Christ, even as it led to their own death.

We celebrate the *Minor Festival: St Peter and St Paul*, because we too are the worst of sinners, who have come to know the unfathomable depths of God's mercy and grace. As Christians we are forgiven before God only because the blood of Jesus was shed for our sins. We are part of Christ's kingdom only because the Holy Spirit has called us to faith through baptism and the power of God's Word. We are heirs of eternal life only because the Father raised his Son from the dead and defeated death forever. May we, like Peter and Paul, continue to dedicate our lives to the one who has redeemed and saved us. Let us continue to preach and proclaim Christ so that others might be led to find in Jesus the only God and Savior.

For Peter read **Acts 4:1-12** , *For Paul* read **Acts 17:16-34**.... as today's Scripture Lessons.

Blessings to you and your families,
Pastor Matthew Guse