

Readings: Acts 12: 1-11, Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18, Matthew 16: 13-19



Fr Michael says:

Each of these two saints is important for different reasons. Peter is important because he was the first Pope and kept the church united which was growing very rapidly in the years following Pentecost. In the first years after Pentecost it was Jews who accepted Jesus as the Saviour and so the early church was a very Jewish church. But as time went on Paul began to preach also to non-Jews, the Gentiles as they were called. All of us are Gentiles. His preaching was very successful and he brought huge numbers of non-Jews into the church. It is because of Paul that we are now in the Church. So both Peter and Paul had very important tasks in the early church, Peter maintaining the unity in the church, and Paul who taught the Jews that Jesus is the fulfilment of their hopes and taught the non-Jews that Jesus is the Saviour.

It is interesting to note the personalities of both Peter and Paul. Peter was impetuous, telling Jesus that he would die with him at the Last Supper if necessary (John 13:37) but later that night he denied he knew him. We also remember Peter's objection to Jesus' prediction that he would suffer and die in Jerusalem and Jesus said 'Get behind me Satan because the way you think is man's way and not God's way' (Matt 16:23). Yet what made Peter a suitable candidate for Jesus' call was his love, so three times Jesus asked him if he loved him and asked him to look after the flock.

Paul had a fiery personality. In his early life he channelled that fire towards persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem. After his conversion Paul's preaching was fiery and upset the churches, but he spent time in Tarsus before he began his preaching. It was a time for him to cool down and learn what the death and resurrection of Jesus meant for us all. Why did God call Paul? Paul was a highly educated Pharisee and it would be only someone like him who could see that faith in Jesus demanded a totally new relationship with God for Jews, and also he had a very strong personality which he needed to help the Jews to accept that Jesus was the Saviour of all peoples, and that because of Jesus there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew. Paul had the strong personality needed for that daring challenge and the insight to see that faith in Jesus is the fulfilment of their Hebrew Testament hopes, and was now required for salvation.

Looking at the personalities of Peter and Paul, we see that God called them to use their personalities to spread the Gospel, Peter to use his impetuous love to look after the flock, and Paul to use his training as a Pharisee and his strength of character to ensure that the non-Jews would be welcomed into the church. It is a reminder to us that our talents and our weaknesses too can become God's means of helping others, if we allow. We don't have to be perfect for God to work through us, God can work through us, faults and all, as he did with Peter and Paul.