

“Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it”(Mt 16:15-16,18). After the resurrection, Jesus came to Peter and asked him to be a good shepherd for the flock and to follow in his footsteps as the leader of the Church. “I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (Jn 21:18). Jesus was crucified, and Peter would indeed follow in his footsteps. In Rome, during a period of persecution, Peter served the church as its first pope and was martyred in 64 AD. “He was crucified upside-down at his own request, because he claimed he was not worthy to die as his Lord. He was buried on Vatican hill, and St. Peter’s Basilica is built over his tomb.”<sup>i</sup>

Shortly after the time of Peter’s death, the Apostle Paul arrived in Rome in chains. He was placed under house arrest awaiting trial. He had a fair amount of freedom and was allowed to proclaim the Good News, receive visitors, and correspond with churches instructing them in the faith and how they needed to grow as a community. If you live by the sword, you shall die by the sword (Mt 26:52). Paul had been the most zealous Pharisee persecuting Christians with vigor. With his dramatic conversion at the hands of God, Paul became the great Apostle to the Gentiles. To the Jews he left behind, he was a traitor and a man who denied the Jewish faith. His enemies wanted to see him die by the sword. In 67 AD he died a martyr’s death similar to John the Baptist. He was buried outside the wall surrounding the city of Rome. And like Peter he is now buried in a basilica that bears his name.

On June 29th, we celebrate the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. November 18<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the dedication of the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul. The Emperor Constantine built the first Basilica for Saint Peter and a church for Saint Paul in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The present basilica of Saint Peter was consecrated the 18<sup>th</sup> of November 1626 by Pope Urban VIII. The new basilica for Saint Paul was consecrated December 10<sup>th</sup> 1854 by Pope Pius the IX.

Both Peter and Paul had human weakness and knew failure. Both are witnesses to the power of God to take clay and reshape it into something strong and beautiful. Through God’s forgiveness, every Christian can experience a new beginning. “Only when we experience God’s forgiveness do we truly experience rebirth. From there we start over, from forgiveness; there we rediscover who we really are in the confession of our sins.”<sup>ii</sup> With forgiveness, we start anew. God calls us to forgive others as he has forgiven us and to give our very best to helping others to come and know Christ. In our humility, not in our strength, God can work miracles in our lives.

On the Feasts of Peter and Paul, the pope often blesses a white woolen vestment known as a pallium for each new metropolitan archbishop. Pope Francis explains: “The pallium recalls the sheep that the shepherd is called to bear on his shoulders. It is a sign that the shepherds do not live for themselves but for the sheep.” Jesus the Good Shepherd laid down his life on the cross for our salvation. Peter and Paul followed the example that Christ set.

Our life situation may not call us to die for the faith as a martyr, but each Christian is called to be a witness to the Good News. God calls us to lay down our lives by sharing and sacrifice that others may see the Good News through our humble lives.

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<sup>i</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/saint/sts-peter-and-paul-501

<sup>ii</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/news/saints-peter-and-paul-witness-to-the-power-of-gods-forgiveness-pope-says-48305