



Saints Peter and Paul

Feast Day: June 29th

Today, we celebrate Peter and Paul – who died in Rome for their faith – as missionary disciples, who radically impacted the Church and exemplify the mercy of God.



Peter's Story:

St. Peter, affectionately known as the model apostle, for his journey of faith. Born in the first century as Simon, Jesus called him to be a disciple at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry; he was given the name Peter. Like James and John, Simon was a fisherman alongside his brother, [St. Andrew](#). They were on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus called them to be disciples. (St. Andrew was previously a disciple of [St. John the Baptist](#)). It was Andrew who introduced Peter to Jesus as the Messiah, according to the Gospel of John. Throughout the New Testament, the bond between Peter and Jesus is undeniable. Peter frequently is the apostle who asks Jesus questions about his teachings, his ministry and his journey. He is depicted as a leader, even among the other apostles, which is fitting because he is the first pope, in the Roman Catholic tradition.

St. Peter is an incredible model of missionary discipleship – not despite, but because of his infamous denial of Jesus three times after the Last Supper. Peter, unlike Judas, did not betray Jesus. It is in his denial that we, as disciples on mission, in the face of great evil and persecution can find hope and refuge because Peter turned back to God and received the mercy of God. This infamous act of denial should not be taken as a detraction from Peter's discipleship, because it empowers us to encounter our

own vulnerability and embrace the mercy of God. We are called to be merciful as God is merciful. Peter is the rock upon the Catholic Church was established, following the Resurrection and Ascension.

In John 21:15 – 19, Jesus asks Peter a question three times – a parallel to Peter’s three denials – asking, “Do you love me?” Three times Peter says yes. “Tend my sheep,” Jesus says. Though, at the time, Peter does not quite understand the request, Peter does exactly that as a missionary disciple, fearlessly spreading the Gospel to all people after the Ascension.



Paul’s Story:

St. Paul was a Jewish man, born around the same time as Jesus in Cilicia, which became a part of the Roman Empire known as Syria before Paul reached adulthood. It is believed that Paul wrote 7 out of the 27 books in the New Testament – Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. It is unlikely his family had wealth, but Paul did speak and write in Greek, officially called “Koine” because it was not in a literary or professional style. Though he would not be considered an aristocrat, he was a Pharisee before his conversion. As a result, Paul spent a portion of his adulthood persecuting Christians and condemning the emerging Christian movement.

Paul, who is referred to as Saul, was “breathing murderous threats against the disciples of the Lord,” when he set off to Damascus to “find any men or women who belonged to the Way [and] bring them back to Jerusalem in chains.” (Act 9: 1 -2) Suddenly, he had a vision on the road to Damascus where God revealed Jesus as the one who Paul was persecuting. Paul was quite literally blinded by this revelation. For three days, he did not eat or drink in Damascus; it wasn’t until a disciple – Ananias – had a vision where God instructed him to go baptize Paul by laying hands on him. And, he did and Paul recovered. God spoke highly of Paul to Ananias, foreshadowing Paul’s fate: “Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites.” (Act 9:15)

Paul proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God throughout Damascus. But he faced adversity from both Jews and disciples of Christ. Eventually, [St. Barnabus](#) brought him into the circle of apostles. Paul and Barnabus journeyed together as missionary disciples to spread the Gospel.

Paul was an exceptional evangelist because he was familiar with the Greek language and culture, his training in Jewish theology helped him connect the Old Testament with the gospel, and as a skilled worker, he could support himself. Like St. Stephen, (considered the first Christian martyr) who zealously proclaimed Jesus as the awaited Messiah to the Sanhedrin – who condemned Jesus to death – Paul too faced brutal adversity throughout his ministry, resulting in his death at the hands of the Roman Empire around 64 A.D.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)

This was Paul’s spirituality. He believed grace and mercy come from God, not us. Only in God can we accomplish the task set before us: to be living witnesses of the Gospel. He was an apostle to the Gentiles, whereas Peter was an apostle to the Jews.

Saints Peter and Paul, pray for us.