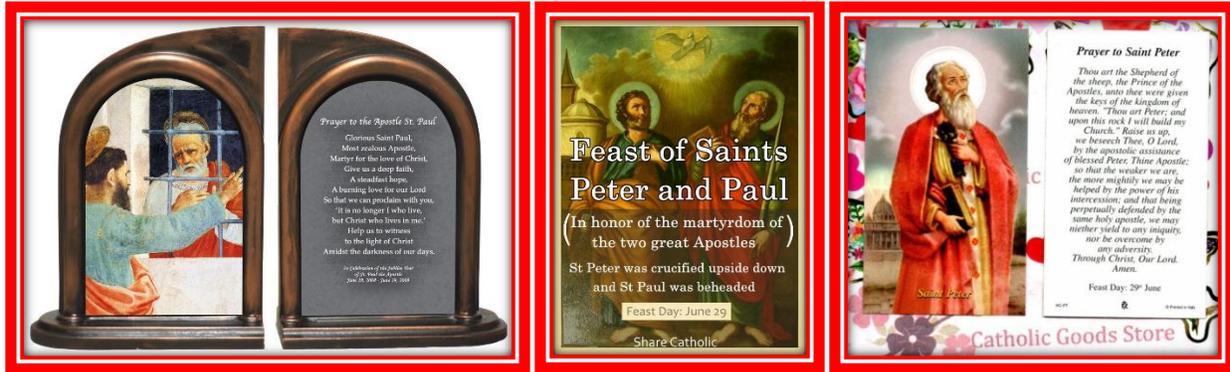


June 29, 2020 – Monday - Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul



**“Looking to the ever merciful and compassionate Lord, and receiving from Him, the grace of repentance, and overcoming our ‘branded life of guilt or shame or misery or unfaithfulness or sin’ to become saints like St Peter and St Paul!
(Acts 12:1-11 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18 Mt 16:13-19)**

Happy Feast of St Peter and St Paul – the mighty and valiant warriors of our Faith.

There were two brothers who were convicted of stealing sheep in a particular place. In accordance with the brutal punishment of that society, both were branded on their forehead with the letters S T, which stood for "Sheep Thief." One of them, unable to bear the stigma, ran away to a foreign place. But people would ask him about the letters on his brow, and what they meant. Thus, he wandered from land to land. Finally, full of bitterness, he ended his life and was buried in a forgotten grave. But the other brother repented of his misdeed and did not go away from his home. He said to himself: "I can't escape from the fact that I stole sheep. So, I will remain here, until I win back the respect of my neighbors and myself." As the years passed by, he established a reputation for respectability and integrity. One day a stranger in this town saw this man (by now, old) with the letters S T branded on his forehead. He asked a native what they signified. After a little thought, the villager said: "It all happened a great while ago, and I have forgotten the particulars, but I think the letters are an abbreviation of SAINT." The man whose forehead was branded with 'S T' to signify SHEEP-THIEF, had repented and revived his life so much that other people, by now, experienced him as a SAINT.

Yes, the marvelous grace of God in the penitent and a believing heart is able to transform the 'detestable scars and branding of sin' into an 'emblem of honor and beauty'! It is this transformative power and grace of the Lord that we thank and celebrate on this Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

God's Power and beauty of Love in bringing contrasting characters to come together in the Church:

One of the most beautiful aspects of the Love of God is that it brings people of contrasting characters and temperaments to come together in the Church. The love of

God respects individuality but forges together beautiful relationships. The love of God maintains personal traits but mingles together wonderful team-efforts. Such is the power and beauty of God's Love.

Different in Sts. Peter and Paul

St Peter and St Paul were certainly quite different – in their upbringing, in their temperament, and in their nature. **1** St Peter probably just had, what is called in our days 'elementary education'. **2** He was a fisherman, married with a family, and had the enormous privilege of having known and worked alongside Jesus during his ministry. **3** He was chosen by Jesus as the leader of the apostles. **4** He was impulsive by nature and often said and did things without prior second thought.

On the other hand, **1.** St Paul was a graduate from one of the prestigious universities of his day (perhaps, like the Oxford or Cambridge in our days) and had been tutored by the famous leader of the Hillel School of Rabbis called Gamaliel. **2.** He was very well-versed in the Scriptures and lived passionately by the Jewish Law. **3.** He spent his early years persecuting Christians and seeking to end the movement called "Christianity". **4.** He was converted after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.

There is more. **1.** The real name of Peter was 'Simon', meaning: 'he who hears' (from Hebrew) or 'flat-nosed' (from Greek) His nickname was 'Cephas' in Aramaic or Petros in Greek, meaning 'the rock'. The real name of Paul was 'Saul', meaning: 'asked for' or 'prayed for' (from Hebrew). His nickname was "Paul", meaning 'short in height' or 'small'. **2.** St Peter denied Jesus three times before His Crucifixion; later, after the Resurrection, he would be asked to affirm three times to the question, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?". St Paul persecuted the Church and affirmed the stoning of the first martyr, St Stephen; later, he would be asked the pertinent question on the road to Damascus, "Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Common in both Saints - they did not look into themselves rather looked onto to Christ

Despite all these differences, the two apostles had an important aspect in common: They both took part in the mighty miracle of "repentance". Ordinarily, both these persons would have perhaps drowned themselves in the sea of sorrow and misery, if they got stuck to their past life and depended only themselves. Peter could have felt "I was given so many special privileges by the Lord. I was to be a model for others to follow. I had even boasted that I would give up my life for the Lord! But now I have failed, and I can never ever be credible in life! What would others think of me? I would be branded forever by others... An imposter... A traitor... A boaster... A betrayer! It's the end of my life and It's all over for me!"

Paul could have felt "I have been such a dreadful persecutor. My name and presence would cause such terror to the innocent followers of Christ. I have made my life an absolute wreck and can never be credible in life! What would others think of me?"

I would be branded forever by others... A persecutor... A tormentor. A tyrant... A Cheater! It's the end of my life... It's all over for me!"

But **they did not look into themselves rather looked onto to Christ!** And they found strength and hope. They found the Grace to Repent! Yes, the marvelous grace of God in the penitent and a believing heart is able to change and transform the 'detestable scars and branding of sin' into an 'emblem of honor and beauty'.

Today they are remembered with honor and admired with great respect. St Peter and St Paul are the pillars of the Church! Their names today stand for mighty courage, passionate love for the Lord and faithful submission to God's Will.

Is my life also being "branded" with guilt or shame or misery or unfaithfulness or sin? Let's not get discouraged and drown ourselves into misery! Instead, may we look to the Lord, Who is ever merciful and compassionate, and receive the grace of repentance, which can help us to also become saints.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, I profess and believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are my Lord and my Savior who has set me free from sin and deception. Make my faith strong like the Apostles Peter and Paul and give me boldness to speak of you to others that they may come to know you as Lord and Savior.

Jesus, I Trust In You