

The Solemnity of Sts. Peter & Paul, Apostles

June 29, 2025

When Pope Francis died, almost two months ago now, the eyes of the whole world were on Rome and the selection process for the new pope. Everyone was speculating on which cardinal would be chosen to be the new successor of Saint Peter. Along with that came a lot of opinions about what the Church needed in a new leader. Many people in the media said that the new Pope needed to be someone who was passionate about the environment. Others said that we needed a Pope who could bring the Church into the modern world. Usually that meant making the Church look more like the world. And there were many other people expressing their opinion about what type of personality and values the next successor of Saint Peter should have.

When Pope Leo XIV came on the balcony to address the crowds at Saint Peter's Basilica, he said:

Peace be with you all. Dearest brothers and sisters, this is the first greeting of the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd, who has given his life for God's flock. I too would like that this greeting of peace enters your heart, reaching your families, and all people, wherever they are, to all peoples, to all the earth. Peace be with you."

With these words, Pope Leo XIV expressed beautifully what his mission is as the successor of Saint Peter. It is not to push an agenda. It is not to advocate for one side over another. Rather, it is to preach the good news that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He is the one who gives true and lasting peace. Any other message the Pope brings to the world stems from this central truth. Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, is Lord.

That mission of the pope comes directly from Jesus. In today's gospel, it is Simon who speaks out boldly and clearly when Jesus asks them who they say that He is. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is then that Jesus changes his name to Peter, the Rock, and proclaims that He will build His Church on that rock.

It is interesting that Jesus and the disciples were in a city called Caesarea Philippi. That city is built on a massive rock that is about 100 feet high. It was against that backdrop that Jesus called Peter "Rock". The Church that Jesus Christ would build would be

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even more impressive than that city built on a cliff. And Saint Peter and his successors would be its leaders.

Jesus makes a promise to Peter - that all the powers of death and hell will not be able to defeat the Church that He is building on the rock of Saint Peter. The followers of Jesus have faced opposition and persecution. The world's most powerful empires have tried to silence the preaching of the gospel. But none of them have succeeded, and none of them can succeed. That is because the Church is not something that human beings have created. Rather it is a reality that Jesus Himself established and continues to build. And at this present moment in history, Pope Leo XIV is called to lead us in our mission of proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

On this day, the Church all over the world celebrates two great saints who gave their lives for Jesus in Rome. Saint Peter is the rock on whom Jesus builds the Church. And Saint Paul is the great preacher whom Jesus used to spread the gospel all over the non-Jewish world. They remind us about who we are as a Church and what our mission is.

There is always the temptation to make the Church something less than she is. Many people would like to reduce it to a charitable organization that goes around doing good for the needy. That is certainly a part of our mission but it doesn't tell the whole story. There are others who would like to see the Church become a spokesperson for all kinds of different political agendas both on the right and left sides of the political spectrum. While it is important for the Church to speak on issues of justice and peace, Jesus is calling us to something more.

What is that "something more"? It is to preach Jesus Christ risen from the dead. It is to preach the love of a God who did not spare His own Son to save us. And it is to live out that truth with joy by loving others. Anything else we do must be a result of this central truth. When we lose sight of that - when we start to see ourselves simply as a charitable institution or as morality police - then we are less effective witnesses to the love of God in the world.

Pope Leo XIV is keenly aware of this, as was Pope Francis before him. As he said in

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the homily he gave at his inaugural Mass: "Brothers and sisters, this is the hour for love! The heart of the Gospel is the love of God that makes us brothers and sisters."

That is our mission as followers of Jesus Christ - to bring His love to others. Whenever that is our focus, we are standing on firm ground. Whenever we lose that focus, we lose our way and fall. So, on this day when we commemorate these two great saints who gave their lives to preach the love of the resurrected Jesus, let us pray for our Holy Father Pope Leo XIV, that He can have strength to lead us after the example of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. And let us pray that we too will have hearts full of love to serve one another.