

- Today is the day the Church sets aside a solemnity for the Apostles Peter and Paul—the two great pillars of the Church.
- Peter and Paul. What an unlikely dynamic duo to be celebrated together.
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- First we have Peter...the rough, tough fisherman...the businessman...with the frankness of being no-nonsense, and the subtlety of a bull...probably considered by many he encountered as a country bumpkin...certainly by the religious authorities in Jerusalem.
- His Hebrew name Simeon comes from one of the sons of patriarch Jacob (Israel). The Greek variant is Simon, which we hear most often, and of course he is give the descriptive nickname of what he would become: “Cephas”, but which we know most often as Peter —meaning “rock”...the “rock” upon which Jesus would build His Church.
- Peter is mentioned far more in the scriptures than any other disciple...part of the Jesus’ innermost circle...and is he whom Jesus gave the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, whom He told to feed and care for the His flock, who witnessed Jesus transfigured glory on Mt. Tabor, who was first to enter the empty tomb, and first to be given the grace to recognize that Jesus was the Son of God.
- Then after Pentecost, Peter again takes the leadership position among the apostles, more than any other exhibits the healing power of Jesus, and is the first to preach the Gospel to the non-Jews—the Gentiles—as a result of a divine revelation.
- Even Paul attests to Peter’s importance and position.
- Thus Peter—given that responsibility and authority—is the first leader of our Church...the first pope. And by the same scriptural justification that the apostles used in choosing Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (“*His office let another take*”, from Psalm 109:8), the line of popes and the bishops—and their authority—continue to this day.
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- That Peter had special trust from Jesus is undeniable...especially when we read Luke 22: “...[Jesus said]: “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.*” (Luk 22:31-32 RSV)
- That reading sounds as if Jesus is speaking only about Peter, because of the weakness in modern English in not having different words for the singular and plural “you”. But the text really means:
- “...[Jesus said]: “*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you[all of you apostles], that he might sift you [all] like wheat, but I have prayed for you [Peter] that your [Peter’s] faith may not fail; and when you [Peter] have turned again, strengthen your [Peter’s] brethren.*”
- Thus Jesus again designates Peter as leader and anchor of the apostles...and thus for the entire Church.
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- Then we have Paul... in many ways the opposite of Peter...urbane, cosmopolitan, academic...and yet humble enough to support himself in manual labor as a tentmaker.
- Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, the least of the tribes... receiving his Hebrew name Saul after of the first king of Israel a millennium before—King Saul—who had also been of Benjamin.
- Paul was a young man when in his zeal for his Jewish roots became a persecutor of the new Christian faith.
- But after his immediate conversion on the road to Damascus via his vision of Jesus, he would become Christianity’s greatest advocate and teacher other than Jesus Himself...so much so that very soon after his death and henceforth, he is often referred to simply as “The Apostle”.
- Paul’s immediate and absolute conversion to Christ is a historical event which attests to the divine nature of his conversion...
- ...because in an comparative instant Paul went from dragging people to judgment in chains to becoming the very thing he had theretofore despised—a Christian.

- Paul knowingly gave up a budding career which promised wealth, comfort and renown for what would be a life of hardship, pain and hatred toward himself, and exile from his own people...becoming the great renegade.
- Paul himself writes: “...you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it...so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But...he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles...” (Gal 1:13-16)
- No doubt at any point in his preaching Paul could have reverted back to his old life, and would have been celebrated by his former Jewish comrades for abandoning the new religion and the re-embracing of the old.
- But...as the years passed...he only grew stronger in his love and zeal for Christ...all the way to martyrdom.
- No natural explanation for this self-sacrifice is adequate; only a supernatural explanation suffices...the revelation of Jesus which Paul himself attests in his letters, and which St. Luke chronicles in the Acts of the Apostles.
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- Now, much of Christianity is based upon what Paul wrote, and I must agree with one author that those commentators who state that Christianity is really more Pauline than actually Christian go too far.
- Paul himself would no doubt disagree strongly with that premise... for his whole intent and purpose was to preach Christ to the exclusion of Himself.
- We see this when Paul chastises the Corinthians: “...it has been reported to me...that there is quarreling among you ...each one of you says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ or ‘I belong to Apollos,’ or ‘I belong to Cephas,’ or ‘I belong to Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius

lest anyone should say that you were baptized in my name...For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel..."
(1Cor 1:10-17 RSV)

- Paul gives up all he has so that Christ, not himself, might be honored and proclaimed.
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- Nowhere is the diverse, the eclectic, and yet inclusive, nature of Christianity more vividly on display than with Peter and Paul—so different...so alike.
 - Different, but alike in what really mattered: love of Jesus Christ, and passionate for spreading His Gospel to the world.
 - In this they reflect what we, too, are called to be and to do—to preach Christ with our words and our actions...not faltering under the weight of worldly opinion, but always working to proclaim Christ to all peoples...reflecting Jesus' love for all...particularly here at Mass, in the breaking of the bread...which is no longer bread, but Jesus' Body and Blood.
 - Jesus established His Church through the leadership of Peter, and largely through the teaching of Paul...and has affirmed it continuously throughout these 2000 years by the Holy Spirit.
 - Any human institution which had endured what she has endured throughout the centuries—wars, persecutions, hatred, scandals, internal corruption—would have long ago crumbled into dust...
 - But...despite all of that...despite even ourselves...she holds God's truth... and has the promise of Christ to be with her until the end of the age.
 - Thus He supports her always with His grace and His Holy Spirit... and thus she truly IS the Church of Christ, His Body...and so she will remain until He comes again in glory.