

Today's feast of Saints Peter and Paul is about much more than honoring two great saints. It is about the very foundation—and ongoing mission—of the Church. These two apostles are not only pillars of the early Church; they remain, even now, reminders of what God can accomplish through human weakness, when it is offered in faith.

If you've ever visited a church in Rome, you've likely seen statues of Saints Peter and Paul displayed in prominent places—often at the entrance, near the altar, or overlooking the nave. At St. Peter's Basilica, their towering figures stand on either side of the grand entrance in St. Peter's Square. Together, they represent the spiritual refounding of Rome—not as a city of imperial conquest, but as a center of Gospel witness and Christian brotherhood.

Ancient Roman myth tells of Romulus and Remus, twin brothers raised by a she-wolf, who founded the city. But their story ends in betrayal and fratricide, as Romulus kills his brother to claim power. In the same way, the first brothers we meet in Scripture—Cain and Abel—show us the tragic consequences of sin. Cain could not rejoice in his brother's gift; instead, his envy consumed him.

But Peter and Paul give us a different story—a redemptive story. As Pope Benedict XVI said in his 2012 homily for this feast, Peter and Paul “illustrate a new way of being brothers, lived according to the Gospel, an authentic way made

possible by the grace of Christ's Gospel working within them."^[1] Though they were very different men, and even clashed at times, they were united by something stronger than opinion or personality. They were united in Christ. Their relationship shows us that Gospel communion does not come from uniformity, but from grace—when we allow our differences to become gifts rather than threats.

Peter, especially, is a mirror of our own journey of faith. In today's Gospel, he boldly confesses Jesus as the Christ. What follows—just beyond the verses we hear today—is a sobering moment: Jesus begins to reveal that he must suffer and die, and Peter recoils in fear. “No, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” he exclaims. In that moment, Peter speaks not from faith, but from his own fear and expectations. He is not yet ready to follow Jesus to the cross. Like Peter, we often cling to our own preconceived notions of how God should act—and in doing so, we risk resisting the very path God lays before us.

But the grace of Christ does not abandon Peter in his weakness. In time, that same Peter will grow into the rock upon which the Church stands. There's a beautiful legend that captures this transformation: during a period of intense persecution in Rome, Peter decides to flee. On the road out of the city, he meets Jesus walking in the opposite direction. “Quo vadis, Domine?”—“Where are you going, Lord?” Peter

asks. And Jesus responds, “I am going to be crucified again, this time in Rome.” Peter understands. He turns back, ready to face his own crucifixion—ready to follow Jesus, even to death.

Peter comes to see what we so often forget: that following Jesus to the cross does not mean walking alone. The cross we carry is never ours alone to bear. Jesus walks with us. His grace and mercy sustain us. The very one who calls us to follow him also strengthens us, transforms us, and enables us to carry more than we could ever imagine. In our suffering, he is present. In our fear, he gives courage. And in every cross we carry, it is Christ who carries it with us.

It is only by following Jesus to the cross that Peter finds the fullness of life. The same is true for us. When we choose not to follow Jesus—by avoiding the sacrifices, the challenges, the path of the cross—something will always be missing. We were made to follow him. And the cross is not the end of the story. Resurrection always follows.

So today, we do more than honor Peter and Paul. We are invited to imitate them. We are invited to lay down our fears, our pride, and our expectations. We are invited to trust that God can turn weakness into strength, conflict into communion, and death into life.

Ask yourself today:

Where am I being called to follow Jesus more faithfully?

Where have I been resisting the cross, thinking I must carry it alone?

What might change if I believed that Christ is walking with me—carrying it with me?

Like Peter and Paul, may we become witnesses—not of our perfection—but of God’s mercy. And may we, too, become living stones in the Church Christ continues to build.

1. Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Holy Mass for the Imposition of the Sacred Pallium on Metropolitan Archbishops*, Vatican Basilica, June 29, 2012, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120629_pallium.html.