



## Reflection Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul 28 / 29 June by Mgr Daniel McHugh

### Thanksgiving for Apostolic Witness

Every week now I am in touch with the little team that puts together “The Burning Bush”, the 10 minute vlog which many people are using as a pause to come into the presence of God on a Sunday usually, or another day if that is not possible.



SANCTUS PETRUS



SANCTUS PAULUS

Paintings in St Peter and St Paul Church, Wolverhampton

This week we are preparing for the Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul, and we wanted a picture of the Saints. I was in touch with Monsignor Mark Crisp, and he arranged to send pictures of the paintings of the Saints in that historic church in Wolverhampton, and the pictures will be part of the vlog. My memory of the church and its connection to the Gifford family, a Recusant Catholic family, who had held to

the Faith at the time of persecution

in England. The Catholic Church began in persecution and it has grown because of the life and witness, sometimes involving the shedding of Blood by those who witness to Jesus.

St Peter and St Paul are often called the Princes of the Apostles because they were the outstanding witnesses from Jerusalem to Rome at the beginning of the Christian era. Pope Francis in his homily for this Feast last year, first of all pointed to the Gospel today where Jesus says “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” The answers gave the names of great people like John the Baptist and Elijah or Jeremiah, all of whom had died. So, the Lord said, “But you, who do you say I am.” And Peter answered “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” A name that means the Messiah, someone who is the present and the future, not the past.

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The Pope said Jesus the Christ is a living person, not a memory from the past and I quote “The witness is not someone who knows the story of Jesus, but someone who has experienced a love story with Jesus; witness arises from an encounter with the living Jesus. The witness, in the end, proclaims only this: that Jesus is alive and that he is the secret of life.” And Pope Francis went on to say of St Paul “At the centre of St Paul’s life too, we find the same word that rises up from Peter’s heart: Christ. Paul repeats this name constantly, almost four hundred times in his letters! For him, Christ is not only a model, an example, a point of reference: he is life itself. Paul writes: for me to live is Christ (Phil 1 : 21). Jesus is Paul’s present and his future.”

The 2 founding Fathers of the Church at first sight were not ideal for the job; if you were a recruitment person looking for a good H.R. spec. I always think of the story of “Domine, Quo Vadis?” a place on the outskirts of Rome on the famous Via Appia. Peter was escaping persecution and as he made his way out, he met an apparition, it was Jesus coming in: Peter said “Domine, Quo Vadis” Lord, where are you going? And Jesus replied “I am going to Rome to be crucified a second time.” The Apostle went back into the City, where he was imprisoned and martyred.

And, Paul was engaged in persecuting Christians before Christ called him to conversion on the Road to Damascus. I remember the words of Our Lord in another context “You did not choose me, no I chose you and called you to go out”. And when Jesus came “to set fire to the earth” as he said, he chose these unlikely instruments. Their response reminds me of St Therese of Lisieux who expressed her answer to the call of the Lord in a poem “All my life Love.”

We see that same response in Peter and Paul. For that we honour them: one day we may be able to go to where their relics are, under the High Altar in St Peter’s and St Paul’s in Rome, and remember, and be inspired by their giving all in love, even to shedding their blood, and give thanks for their Apostolic witness.

For ourselves, with our Churches now open for prayer, if not yet for the Mass, we can encounter, come face to face with Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacles of our Churches. There, like the great Apostles, we experience his forgiveness and love, and can give ourselves completely in answer to his call, be his witnesses, to play our part in setting fire to the earth.

We have to move beyond computers, finding out stats , learning what people are saying about Jesus. He is not interested in the scandals and polls. He wants witnesses who say to Him each day “You are my life,” says Pope Francis. Inspired by “Peter and Paul, we can set before us the ideal expressed by Paul in his second letter to his co-worker Timothy in today’s reading: “As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation ... I have fought the good fight to the end ... I have kept the Faith ... The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

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THE ARCHDIOCESE *of* BIRMINGHAM

## Ethnic Chaplaincies

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When the Giffords set up a Chapel in Wolverhampton, hundreds of years ago now, it was so that Catholic Priests in Penal Times could bring the Eucharist to the people. They knew that is where we encounter the living Lord, and for that they were ready to make even the ultimate sacrifice.

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