



Coming closer to our Faith
The Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul 29 June 2025

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

"Their sound goes forth through all the earth" Psalm 19

As I write this Reflection for the Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul, I can see beside me on the wall of my living room a picture of 3 young students standing in the Colonnade with St Peter's Basilica in the background. Two of the 3 are deceased; the one who took the picture and I are still living with many wonderful memories to share of our time in Rome. Sunday 29 June this year will be a day when pilgrims to Rome will make memories that last too. It is a special Jubilee Year and many pilgrims will go to Rome and St Peter's in particular from all over the world.

It is a time then to reflect on the purpose of Pilgrimage: not all of us can go to Rome, so many more will be going on pilgrimages to more local places to mark the Jubilee Year. It is a good time I think to consider the personal and religious nature of the act of pilgrimage. In 2016, the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis spoke as follows to many thousands gathered in St Peter's Square: *"A Pilgrimage is not the same as a vacation....making a Pilgrimage to shrines is one of the most eloquent expressions of the faith of God's people....The reality is that the Pilgrim carries within him his own history and faith and lights and shadows of his own life. Each person carries within his or her heart a special wish and a particular prayer. Those who enter the Shrine immediately feel they are at home, welcomed, understood and supported."*

In September I will be with a group of Pilgrims going to Puglia in South East Italy. It will be an enjoyable break from our usual routines for all of us, but it will be more than that. As one blog puts it: *"On a Pilgrimage, we encounter God in the very places where he has revealed himself....It is a transformational experience that changes lives and brings us closer to our faith in ways we could never imagine through sincere and concentrated prayer."*

Those going to Rome this weekend and present in St Peter's Square for the Mass and the Angelus afterwards will be present as pilgrims at what is probably the oldest Feast kept by the Church worldwide: the Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul. By the 4th Century in the Sanctoral Cycle 3 Masses were celebrated in Rome on this day: One in St Peter's, one in St Paul's and another in the Catacombs of St Sebastian, where it is said the bodies of the 2 great Apostles were hid in early days. Simon was a fisherman from Bethsaida, who later settled in Capernaum. He was introduced to Our Lord by his brother Andrew, but prepared for it by another his encounter with John the Baptist. Our Lord changed his name to Peter, meaning rock, so combining his name with his role in the Church. He was one of the first to see the Risen Christ, and had a special Apparition of Jesus. After the

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Ascension of Our Lord, he took on the overall direction of the Christian Community; he proclaimed the outline of the 'Good News' and was the first to become aware that the Church should be open to all, the Gentiles/ pagans as well as the Jews. His spiritual role did not remove him from human limitations and St Paul did not hesitate to contradict him in open discussion, for example about the necessity of the Church Community being bound by Hebrew traditions. When Peter came to Rome he became the 'Apostle for All'; he fulfilled his mission to be the cornerstone of a building that united all peoples, and gave his blood in fulfillment of that mission.

Paul, after his conversion on the road to Damascus, travelled in four or five journeys across the Mediterranean evangelising the peoples he encountered. Like me, you may have been to Turkey on holiday and become aware of the vast areas he covered in his enthusiasm for the spread of the good news; my most recent journey beyond Italy was to Greece and in particular to Athens where he debated with philosophers about the reality of the Resurrection. He arrived in Rome about 60AD and ended up in prison for preaching the Risen Lord about 63; there he wrote his Letters from Prison. He was martyred about 67AD.

Peter and Paul were the first two great teachers of the Faith we hold dear, and going to the places where their remains lie inspire the Church Community today.

I have no doubt Pope Leo himself celebrating his first Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul will be inspired as he walks in their steps in Rome, and will encourage all who are there on Pilgrimage to renew their living and proclamation of the Faith. I read with interest his address to Seminaries in a Jubilee Year event dedicated to them on 24 June: *"the role of the seminaries is that of living with the heart of Christ, becoming proclaimers both humble and strong of the Word that saves, of a Church that is open and missionary in outreach."* Those words take us back to the time of Peter and Paul. Wherever we go on Pilgrimage may we come closer to their faith, our faith, and may we all play our part in sharing their Faith as Paul urges in Romans 10 taking up the words of the Psalm in the Vigil Mass of St Peter and St Paul *"their sound goes forth through all the earth"*.
"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news."

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