

Sts. Peter & Paul - A
Acts 12:1-11;
II Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18;
Matthew 16:13-19
Little Flower - 6/22/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul. If you read last week's bulletin, you know that today is my 39th anniversary of ordination. I was ordained in St. Peter's Square on June 29, 1975 by Pope Paul VI.

Today's Preface in the former Sacramentary referred to Peter as "our leader in the faith" and to Paul as "its fearless preacher." As I thought about today's Solemnity, it struck me that Peter and Paul represent two dimensions of the Church. Peter represents the more structural or institutional dimension of the Church. In today's Gospel, Jesus said to Peter, "*And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*" Paul was the fearless missionary preacher to the Gentiles. A good part of the Acts of the Apostles is the story of Paul's missionary journeys. Paul represents the missionary dimension of the Church.

Both are essential dimensions of the Church. In reality, both Peter and Paul embodied both dimensions of the Church. On Pentecost, it was Peter who first proclaimed the Good News of Jesus to the people of Israel. For his part, Paul established churches in the cities and towns where he preached. Even during his travels, he continued to exercise leadership over those churches.

Because both are essential dimensions of the Church, both are also essential dimensions of every parish. Little Flower parish is more than the sum of the parishioners. We believe in and profess the same faith. We celebrate our faith sacramentally. Our community has staying power because we are a structured community. Our beautiful church with our beautiful campus is a very visible sign of the Church. At the same time, as a parish we are called to go beyond ourselves to proclaim to others by word and by deed the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are called to evangelize and in some cases re-evangelize within the larger communities of which we are part.

From the time I first wanted to be a priest in the first grade through my seminary years to today, both the Church and the world have changed dramatically. In the past, Catholics and those interested in becoming Catholic came to us. In the 1960s, as the Eastside developed, Little Flower with its large families became the largest parish in the Archdiocese. A priest from another Archdiocese once told me that when his home parish was established, before there were many members, the founding pastor built a school large enough for three classrooms of each grade! And the people came.

Today parishes, including ours, cannot count on people coming. We have to reach out to them. If I have any hope for *Connected in the Spirit* going forward, it is that as a cohort we will develop programs and processes for the evangelization and re-evangelization of our part of the Eastside and that we will do community outreach to serve the needs of those in our midst whose needs are greater than our own.

My brothers and sisters, today I am grateful for my vocation and for my 39 years of priesthood. However, a priest's vocation is shaped and nurtured by so many people. Therefore, I am grateful today to my family, to the priests, sisters, teachers, and parishioners of Little Flower as I was growing up, the seminaries in which I studied, the pastors, staffs, and parishioners of the parishes in which I have served, the staff of the Tribunal, and finally to you. When I returned to Little Flower in 2003, my life came full circle.