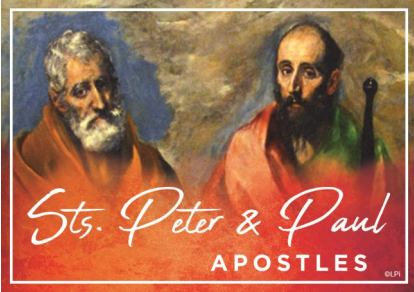


FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for all the kindness you showed to Fr. Siffredus and I on Father's Day. We are happy to be your spiritual fathers. Speaking of spiritual fathers, this Saturday is the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles. Here is an excerpt from Pope Francis' preaching about these two men.

“The Apostles Peter and Paul stand before us as witnesses. They never tired of preaching and journeying as missionaries from the land of Jesus to Rome itself. Here they gave their ultimate witness, offering their lives as martyrs. If we go to the heart of that testimony, we can see them as witnesses to life, witnesses to forgiveness, and witnesses to Jesus. Witnesses to life - their lives, though, were not neat and linear. Both were deeply religious: Peter was one of the very first disciples (cf. Jn 1:41), and Paul was “zealous for the traditions of [his] ancestors” (Gal 1:14). Yet they also made great mistakes: Peter denied the Lord, while Paul persecuted the Church of God. Both were cut to the core by questions asked by Jesus: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” (Jn 21:15); “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus called them by name and changed their lives. After all that happened, He put His trust in them, in one who denied Him and one who persecuted His followers, in two repentant sinners.

There is a great teaching here: the starting point of the Christian life is not our worthiness. The Lord loves us just as we are; He is looking for people who are not self-sufficient, but ready to open their hearts to Him. People who, like Peter and Paul, are transparent before God. Peter immediately told Jesus: “I am a sinful man” (Lk 5:8). Paul wrote that he was “least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle” (1 Cor 15:9). Throughout life, they preserved this humility, to the very end. Peter died crucified upside down, since he did not consider himself worthy to imitate his Lord. Paul was always fond of his name, which means “little,” and left behind his birth name, Saul, the name of the first king of his people. What was the secret that made them persevere amid weakness? It was the Lord's forgiveness. Let us think about them too as **witnesses to forgiveness**. In their failings, they encountered the powerful mercy of the Lord, who gave them rebirth. In His forgiveness, they encountered irrepressible peace and joy. Thinking back to their failures, they might have experienced feelings of guilt. How many times might Peter have thought back to his denial! How many scruples might Paul have felt at having hurt so many innocent people! Humanly, they had failed. **Yet they encountered a love greater than their failures, a forgiveness strong enough to heal even their feelings of guilt.** Only when we experience God's forgiveness do we truly experience rebirth. From there we start over, from forgiveness; there we rediscover who we really are: in the confession of our sins.

Witnesses to life and witnesses to forgiveness, Peter and Paul are ultimately **witnesses to Jesus**. In the Gospel for the Solemnity of Ss. Peter and Paul, the Lord asks: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Peter, after saying: “You are the Christ”, then goes on to say: “the Son of the living God” (v. 16). **Witness arises from an encounter with the living Jesus.** At the center of Paul's life too, we find that 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). Having met Jesus and experienced His forgiveness, the Apostles bore witness to Him by living a new life: they no longer held back, but gave themselves over completely. They were “poured out as a libation” (cf. 2 Tim 4:6). **Let us ask for the grace not to be lukewarm Christians living by half measures, allowing our love to grow cold.** Let us rediscover who we truly are through a daily relationship with Jesus and through the power of His forgiveness. Just as He asked Peter, Jesus is now asking us: “Who do you say that I am?”, “Do you love me?” Let us allow these words to penetrate our hearts and inspire us not to remain content with a minimum, but to aim for the heights, so that we too can become living witnesses to Jesus.”

Peace,