

**Homily for June 29, 2003
Ss. Peter and Paul, Apostles**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Acts 12:1-11
2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
Matthew 16:13-19**

God makes saints out of sinners.

Within the recent past, the Church has been tossed to and fro in storms of controversy. It continues today. Not one storm – many storms. And not in one country – in many countries. The Church has been the target of fierce persecution, and it has also allowed evil to corrupt it from within. Just a few weeks ago our own archdiocese instituted yet another edition of its Child Protection Policy to ensure that no child would suffer at the hands of any diocesan minister or employee. Whether in circumstances of harassment or scandal, the lives of many have been diminished, their confidence undermined and their faith tested.

Without minimizing the sufferings in our current situations, it is good to remember on this feast of Saints Peter and Paul that dire trials are really not new to the Church. From its very beginning it has

faced opposition. It has experienced failure within its most prominent members.

The philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once said, “God creates out of nothing. Wonderful, you say. Yes, to be sure, but he does what is still more wonderful: He makes saints out of sinners.”

First we have Peter – the disciple chosen by Jesus to head the Church, in spite of (or because of?) his blindness, his stubbornness, his sinfulness, his denial of Jesus, and his seeming incomprehension about Jesus’ mission here on earth. This is the disciple forgiven again and again, and affirmed again and again, and, in one of this feast’s readings, freed from a sure and certain death in prison to continue his own mission.

Then we have Paul – a persecutor of believers in Jesus’ way who underwent a truly life-changing conversion on the road to Damascus.

Despite its trials, the Church has survived and even flourished. This is not due to the strength and holiness of its members. Though Jesus told Peter that the Church would be built upon him, “The Church’s (real) foundation is Jesus Christ its Lord.” Jesus is the one who commissioned Peter; Jesus is the one who assures the Church protection. It is Jesus who stood by Paul and gave him strength to bring the gospel to the

broader world. The Church may have been built on Peter the former denier and spread by Paul the former persecutor, but it is the Church of Jesus Christ, and it will endure because of Jesus' promise.

Today we celebrate what God can do in the lives of two very different men, sinners like us all – Saint Peter and Saint Paul. They each struggled in their lives with issues of faith initially and then with the struggles of persecution – all the while following a Jesus who himself was faithful to the call and the urgings he received from God the Father and the Holy Spirit. God is faithful and will be so for us as he has been for Saints Peter and Paul.

The story goes that the angels in heaven were scandalized when Jesus, upon arriving back in heaven, calmly and confidently told them he had left his mission in the hands of a few people who loved him. What does that tell us about Jesus' faith in the likes of Peter and Paul – and of us?

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