

## Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time/Solemnity of SS. Peter & Paul

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

This weekend, whether we honour the twin Apostles on Sunday or Monday, the Church puts before us in the person of Peter and Paul two essential features of its identity. It is no accident that Peter and Paul are twinned in Christian art and in the liturgical life of the Church. Even popular usage twins them: *robbing Peter to pay Paul* is an expression we find in many European languages. The twinning is all the more odd given that they were such different people, both in character, background and in terms of their association with Jesus. Peter was a rough-hewn peasant fisherman from Galilee, impetuous and sentimental, who let his instinct and his heart dictate his actions. Moreover, he was a disciple of Jesus from the outset of his public ministry. Paul was born into the Jewish diaspora in the Greek city of Tarsus, highly educated and literate, eloquent in speech and with his pen, an abstract thinker proud of his Jewish heritage, and a restless traveller.

We proclaim each Sunday our faith in a Church that is: *one, holy, catholic and apostolic*. The Church's unity comes from its shared faith, its common understanding of what the faith means, the universal ownership of what the Church's membership believes, secure in the knowledge that all we hold goes right back to the Apostles. That unity is guaranteed by the successor of Peter, and the see of Rome, of which Peter was first bishop, remains to the present day in the person of Pope Francis the lynchpin of unity. Bishops, who are themselves successors of the Apostles, speak on matters of faith and morals as a college united with one another and with the Successor of Peter. So, in honouring Peter on this feast, we give thanks for the See of Rome, for the role the popes have played in teaching, guiding and maintaining the unity of the Church down the ages, and in giving thanks too for all the graces that come to the Church through the exercise of the Petrine ministry.

The Church may be present all over the globe, yet there are many who have still not heard the Gospel message nor know Jesus Christ. The Church, as Pope Francis frequently reminds us, remains missionary: missionary in parts of the world where the Good News has not yet been preached, but missionary too in the Christian heartlands where many have distanced themselves from the Church's life, know nothing of the message or still have to recognise what being a Christian means. So, Paul and all that he represents are still highly pertinent in today's world. We are frequently assured that post-Covid - 19 there will be a re-discovery of Christian values and a new thirst for faith in the God revealed to us by and in Jesus Christ. The Church will only prosper if it finds again its roots: Peter and Paul represent the twin roots from which the Church draws its life and derives its identity.

**Father Patrick**