

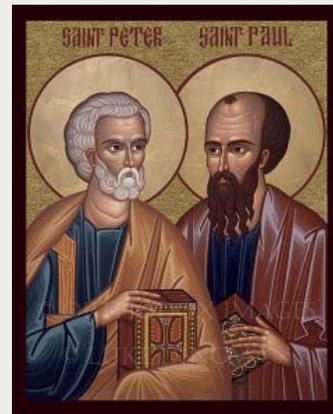
THE BOOK OF ACTS: PETER AND PAUL

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April 25, 2013

After the Resurrection of Our Lord, he appears the apostles on the beach one morning, it is during this encounter that He asks Peter if He loves Him. Why does He ask Peter three times? Could it be to mend of to undo the three times Peter denied Him? Often, we are like Peter - we are or say we are willing to follow God's plan for our lives - only to stumble with some difficulty and quickly deny Him. Like Peter, we want to do His will, we want to follow Him wherever He leads, yet like Peter we often fail, particularly when our circumstances seem more than we can handle.

Peter was a fisherman, one could say a man with a career who did rather well for himself and his family. Suddenly one day, his life is turned upside down by Jesus. The presence of Jesus in his life, changed his life forever. "Jesus said to them, 'Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men'" (Bible, 2005). One cannot help but wonder how those words must have resonated in their hearts, "at once they left their nets and followed him" (Bible, 2005). When Jesus speaks to us it echoes in our hearts and our only response is "here I am Lord" (Bible, 2005). He wants us to follow him but he wants us to do it in an orderly way - that is to say not to try and take on so much that we burn ourselves out and turn away from Him. He does not want us to neglect our families, as many so often do - but rather He wants us to live holy lives for Him in the way He has called us to...in His order not our own.



This is where we so often fail time and time again, often becoming embarrassed that again we have committed that same sin - whatever it might, that sin that has turned us away from His love. We think we can never face Him again, yet we are to imitate Peter and say to Him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" (Bible, 2005). With those words we open our hearts and willingly accept what He may be asking of us... like Peter we receive His love and then share it with others. Our Lord chose Peter for a special mission, "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" (Bible, 2005). We are all sinners yet we are all chosen instruments of God. Although our hearts are dirty, stained by sin, but if we recognize Love, look at Him and allow Him to touch us - we will be suitable to be in His presence; sometimes the greater the sins the greater the ability to recognize God, His mercy and love. So often we can recognize Him, look at Him but we do not allow Him to touch us. Possibly for fear that we cannot handle so much love or fear of the responsibility of accepting so much love...

Some of us are called to more specific missions, but we are all called to bring Christ's love into the world. Those called to a deeper communion, for example through a priestly vocation or religious life, with God - necessarily have the responsibility to reflect His light and love in everything they do. A life well lived, a life that is a true witness to the Gospel can be more valuable than words could ever be, Saint Francis is known to have said something similar to, "preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." God uses us, all of us, in ways we often do not even know. A smile may be the answer the other person was waiting for, a kind word or gesture, words of wisdom... This seemingly insignificant action might be the only ray of light, God's light, to shine in that moment of that person's life...we need only to be docile to the truth. "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation, if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness" (2005).

Peter lived in the truth, he recognized Jesus as the Messiah...as the Son of God. "The God of Abraham, [the God] of Isaac, and [the God] of Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over and denied..." (Bible, 2005). Once he was clear in the truth, understood the truth - he could do nothing more than proclaim it to everyone he encountered. Should we not do the same? Possibly not in the same way as Peter, for we live in very different times, but we should proclaim and live by our beliefs.

There are some of us that are more like Paul - angry with God, with His Church, with the people who attend His Church. We can find fault in each and every one of them. We think they are hypocrites and wonder where the real Christians are...or we think why bother to be Christian at all? To be a hypocrite? While, it is true that there are many Christians like this out there, it is also true there are many good Christians out there. One cannot judge an entire faith by the actions of one person. We are not perfect, we have sinful inclinations - some very deeply rooted and our actions, without it being intended can hurt someone. For example not moving over in the pew at Mass, not yielding a parking spot to an elderly lady, looking at parents in a bad way when their kids act up in a public place, etc... Hence, the reason we have

to be mindful of the way we live our lives, ..."do not have love, I am a resounding gong..." (2005). It is not beneficial for our hearts or others hearts for us to go around preaching the Gospel without first living the Gospel, "you will received power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses (2005).

It is these same people (negative, critical ones) who often are the most enthusiastic about our faith once they have encountered the Lord. To them, nothing is good enough for God - there is nothing they would not bear for Him... They also, for the most part, cease criticizing others but pray for them and/or try to help them by bringing them closer to God. Their perspective changes, they see the world differently - the same things they criticized before now moves them to feel compassion for the other. In retrospect they can see the error of their ways, having learned from their mistakes can help lead other to Jesus. Like Paul, they exhort others to the love they themselves have found. More importantly they urge them to have a relationship with Jesus, to pray to Him... "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (2005).

Jesus taught Peter and Paul how to pray...Peter who had the blessing of learning by example and Paul whose heart was so profoundly touched -he prayed... Luke tells us, "He was praying in a certain place, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples" (2005). How powerful must have been the mere sight of Jesus praying to instill in His disciples the desire to also pray. To pray not as they had done before but as their souls perceived Jesus was praying, perceiving that profound communion between the Father and the Son and desiring to have that same relationship with the Father. He goes on to elaborate on prayer telling them a parable and ending, "I tell you, if he does not get up and give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence" (2005). Jesus teaches them that they have to be persistent in prayer, to ask the Father to fulfill their needs and the more they pray to Him, the more He will grant them their petitions. "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful" (2005). Our hearts, minds, bodies and souls need us to have a relationship based on love and trust with our Creator...something we must forever strive for.

We know the Blessed Mother shared a special communion of heart with Her beloved Son, her life - in every instance - pointed toward Christ. Her preaching was her life, she lived the life of the Gospel, she witnessed the love of Her Son. She calls us to do the same - amidst the trials, tribulations, distractions and disillusionings of everyday life... She calls us to witness the love of Her Son in everything we do, with those we meet, etc..., possibly most important in one's family. Often it is easier to be nice to those we see occasionally than with the people we share our daily lives with...

After Her Son's death, Mary's role is, possibly most important, she lived, simply lived and by her example showed the Apostles how to live...how to bring about all that Her beloved Son had spoken to them about. She taught them how to trust in His words, in His promises...everything He told was being fulfilled before their eyes. It was a crucial moment of our salvation history, the Church needed them to respond, to act, to guide, to expand for the love of Christ. She served the Apostles, the Petrine principle, she helped them, guided them...served them who fulfilled the establishment of the Church that Christ began; she was at their disposal, at their service but above all sustained them in prayer.

Live then preach...May God bless you!

References

The Holy Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

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