

+

Our founding rector, the late Bp. Patrick Murphy, wrote of why our parish was named for St. Peter. He said: *Why did Jesus choose Peter as His chief apostle? Because of Peter's devotion and faith. Obviously these two attributes were essential if Christ's mission was to be fulfilled. Peter's answer from the Gospel tells us why "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are God's holy light." Peter was so completely human and fallible, yet Christ chose him. That's why we chose him as well.*

Simon Peter, whom we refer to as the chief of the Apostles, the Saint who holds the "keys to the kingdom", is too often forgotten as the one Apostles whom we know to have been remarkably human. He had his gifts and his faults, but above all he had a remarkable devotion and faith in our Lord. It is because of his great faith, that some commentators believe this is why Jesus warned him that Satan, *desired to sift him as wheat*. Indeed, his faith was tested, his faith in our Lord was tried and shaken at the crucifixion along with the rest of the Disciples. The crucifixion was difficult for St. Peter to understand or accept, he had previously refused to hear our Lord's prophesy of His impending crucifixion, this earned him the shocking rebuke from the Lord to, *get behind me, Satan!* And when the day of the crucifixion came, St. Peter would be forever remembered as having denied any association with the Lord, not just once, but three times. Yet it should be noted that Peter did not deny the Lord and then run away, he stayed close at hand, at least for a while, weeping nearby. We do not read any mention of him following Jesus as He bore His cross through the streets of Jerusalem, nor is Peter present at the foot of the cross, though perhaps in that crowd of onlookers standing far off and watching as Jesus died. Even still, Peter did not abandon his fellow disciples, but remained with them and was rewarded by seeing the risen Lord for himself.

We have great reason to admire the work of the Holy Spirit through St. Peter's test of faith, both in his fearlessness and courage which he showed, and still more in his humility, patience, and meekness. He was so transformed and so humbled that he seemed to forget the rank which he held in the church. We see in the Acts of the Apostles that his temper

was no longer rash and uncontrolled but channeled into fervor and constancy with which he labored for the cause of God and the Church. St. Peter set no bounds to his sorrow for having denied the Lord three times, and it has been said that his cheeks were constantly furrowed with tears. St. Peter reminds us that the true penitent sees the enormity of his own sins. This great model of pastors learned by his fall to treat sinners with tenderness and compassion. And in forgiving St. Peter and charging him to keep His sheep, our Lord shows his boundless mercy, and how perfectly true repentance blots out sin. The rest of St. Peter's life was marked by the profound virtue of humility, even to the point of begging to be crucified upside down, because he considered himself unworthy to die in the same manner as his Lord.

According to tradition, in the year 63 AD, while St. Peter, the Apostle to the Jews, was crucified upside down, St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, was beheaded. For this reason, the ancient church celebrated these two great Apostles together. Like St. Peter, St. Paul was also far from perfect and incredibly human. St. Paul had, in a former life, persecuted the church before his conversion on the road to Damascus. After his conversion he went throughout the known world preaching Jesus Christ, and it is recorded in the Book of Acts that he was thought of by many to be *a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world*. We read St. Paul's resume in 2nd Corinthians 11, *from the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren....not to mention ...the care of all the churches*. And let us not forget he spent the final years of his life imprisoned and under house arrest, and finally martyred for preaching Jesus Christ. Through this list of St. Paul's sufferings, we get a glimpse into the kind of test his own faith endured.

St. Peter and St. Paul, two of the greatest men of faith in the Scriptures, with fiery zeal and devotion to Jesus Christ, remind us that even the great saints of old were still remarkably human. These two saints

who did not always get along with each other, are both at the center of the birth of the Church. They are two of the greatest witnesses to Jesus Christ partly because their faith was so radically tested and shaken. God uses those who are devoted to Him and have faith in Him. God uses us regardless of our defects, regardless of our faults, regardless of our ability to get along with others. God transforms the human and the fallible, He tests and transforms our faith. St. Peter and St. Paul are proof to us that God can make each one of us saints. They are proof that even the most confused, unlearned, passionate, and hot tempered among us can be used by God and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. As God said to St. Paul, *my strength is made perfect in weakness*. As St. Peter has written, *you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*. God is infinitely patient and merciful with us, so let us cling to the rock of St. Peter's faith, even during times of doubt and testing, and *count it all joy; Let patience have her perfect work*. That rock will not fail us; for we have our Savior's promise that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Amen.