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Our first rector, the late Bp. Patrick Murphy wrote of this feast and 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 so often as Saint Peter, 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 and he had a remarkable devotion and faith in our Lord. But of course, his devotion and faith were shaken at the Crucifixion along with the rest of the Disciples. St. Peter had previously refused to hear of our Lord's impending crucifixion, to which the Lord exclaimed *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. St. Peter was rather hard-headed and hot tempered until Pentecost when he was transformed by the Holy Spirit.

We have great reason to admire the change which the Holy Spirit made in St. Peter, both in his fearlessness and courage which he showed, and still more in his humility, patience, and meekness. He was so humble that he seemed to forget the rank which he held in the church. His temper was no longer rash and uncontrolled but channeled into fervor and constancy with which he labored for the cause of God and his 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. He teaches 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 chagrining 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.

This transformation was put to the test in one rather surprising episode of the New Testament which includes both St. Peter and St. Paul. By the way, according to tradition these two great saints of the Church are always celebrated together. The rubrics for the day require us to commemorate St. Paul on St. Peter's Feast Day, and St. Peter on St. Paul's Feast Day, to the effect that these two Saints' days have merged together. From this practice we might think these two saints got along famously! However, in Galatians chapter 2 verse 11 we find a disagreement between St. Peter and St. Paul on Christians keeping Jewish Law. The debate turned into quite the argument as St. Paul writes, *But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.* St. Paul was so upset that St. Peter believed that Christians, even newly converted Gentile believers should follow the Law of Moses, that he boldly confronted him, and even wrote to the Galatians, *I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!* Which is pretty strong language for the New Testament.

Like St. Peter, his counterpart St. Paul was also far from perfect and incredibly human. St. Paul had persecuted the church, and therefore had persecuted St. Peter 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 as *a pestilent fellow, a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world*. St. Paul was also a long-winded preacher, *Paul preached unto them...and continued his speech until midnight...and there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft and was taken up dead*. Thankfully, St. Paul stopped preaching, went down and revived the young man, and the young man survived the unfortunate effect of Paul's longwindedness!

Less we think that everything was bad between St. Peter and St. Paul, we find in the second Epistle of St. Peter, *the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you*. It is interesting that from the New Testament alone we see their relationship develop from St. Paul

withstanding St. Peter to his face, to what appears to be St. Peter referring to St. Paul as a beloved brother, full of God's wisdom. Somehow these two saints, who despite their great faith and devotion have such human faults, are used by God. 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 and are two of the greatest saints of the Church, even celebrated on the same feast day.

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. 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 into heroes of the faith. 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, He has given St. Peter the keys to the Kingdom, which have been passed down even to our own parish. God is using this parish to mold us and transform us into His saints. So let us cling to the rock of St. Peter's faith 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.