

[Readings: Acts 12:1-11; Ps. 34; 12 Tim. 4:6-8, 17-18; Matt. 16:13-19]

It's not often that a human being is big enough to trump a Sunday observance! But the two men we honor today do just that; Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and John the Baptist are the only two others with the liturgical clout to do the same. Consider that Saints Peter and Paul, taken together, *are* the Church. That is, they embody two significant aspects of the Church that incorporate the whole and cannot be separated without losing something vital. Those aspects might be defined as action and reason. Peter is a doer, a man of action, and Paul is a thinker, the philosopher. One trait isn't much good without the other.

Peter, the man of action, operates on a hair-trigger of responsiveness whenever a challenge arises. A preacher passes along the shoreline and says, "Come follow me" -- and Peter is gone before the boat is sufficiently docked. Peter drops his nets into the water upon the Lord's command even after a night of fruitless efforts, dragging in a miracle catch as a result. He leaps into the water and tries to walk across its surface because Jesus invites him to. In today's Gospel, he blurts out: "You are the Christ," which is a very dangerous thing to say in Roman-occupied Israel.

Peter is the disciple who draws a sword when Jesus is ambushed on Holy Thursday at the Garden of Gethsemane; a servant's ear is sacrificed before Jesus calls him off. Peter swears impulsively that he will never, ever deny his Lord -- and then denies him three times before the night is out. Three days later, after the Resurrection of Jesus Peter runs at once to the tomb because of a report that it's empty. He will soon leap from a boat and swim to shore at a sighting of Jesus.

On Pentecost Sunday, The Holy Spirit hardly rushes into the upper room in tongues of fire before Peter is out in the street, telling what he knows to the astonished morning crowds. Peter rarely thinks things through. He acts -- and his impulsive actions are both courageous and sometimes premature. Which is where St. Paul comes in.

Paul is a scholar: a man of law, philosophy, and debate. He spent the first half of his life contemplating right action according to the school of the Pharisees. This led him to the decision to persecute Christians, which was the only logical conclusion. But then an experience "on the road" to Damascus derails Paul's rational convictions. Jesus Christ can do that to a person. Paul knows that theological reflection can sometimes change the course you're on completely. After this humbling experience Paul spends three years in an OCIA-like process of formation.

We know that in the Bible, some people name are changed because they are given a new mission, a new vision, a new purpose in life. Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah. Simon becomes Peter. Saul becomes Paul.

Trivia question. When did this happen? For Simon Peter, it was in today's Gospel. For Paul, it didn't happen once and for all on the road to Damascus. He is called Saul another twelve times in the Acts of the Apostles.

Paul continues to think his way through the Judeo-Christian conundrum. How do you reconcile the demands of divine law and divine mercy? How do you live in the Kingdom while remaining in the world? Paul hits the pause button on Peter's relentless action.

Friends, you and I are called, just like Saints Peter and Paul, to be

people of action and people of reflection. Neither one is perfect, and neither are we. God doesn't call the equipped, God equips those He calls!

This week's questions: What prisons in your life still hold you captive? What sin keeps you double chained and longing for freedom?

"Put on your cloak and follow me," the angel says to Saint Peter. Peter, the rock, was in chains -- but freed! "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith": inspirational and challenging words from Saint Paul. Are you "competing well" in your daily living? Do you "keep the faith?" Who is your rock, your foundation in life? Who inspires you? Jesus is your protection, your strength, and your guide.

Help Him build His Church. AMEN!