Saints Peter and Paul 2025

It is said that through the years of marriage, spouses begin to resemble each other, in the way they think and act. Partly because of love; partly because of familiarity. Their identities remain in-tact, but each personality conforms to the other. Not a resemblance born of simple familiarity, but a conformity of identity with God who is Love.

A priest’s life, too, becomes personally identified with Christ: conformity in love. Through his years he looks again at Christ, Christ Crucified, and asks questions similar to those that spouses might ask: *“Who are we to each other? Am I all the things I promised I would be”?* And I go a step further: *“Jesus, am I You”?*

On today’s solemnity, unusually scheduled on a Sunday, we should take a deep look at the personal histories of Saints Peter and Paul. Here, we also find questions of identity everywhere. When Peter first met Jesus, the Lord gave him a new identity: *“You, Simon, shall be called Peter, Rock.”* But before Jesus gave him that new name and title, Simon first had to confess the identity of Jesus: *“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”*  In confessing Jesus’ identity, Peter confessed his own. The Lord wanted nothing less from Peter than perfect conformity with Himself: *“Another will bind you (as they did Me) and take you where you would not go.”*

Until the priest first answers the Lord’s question, *“Who do you say that I am”?* I can never answer *“Who am I”?* my thoughts, words and actions; my fears and desires will answer for me. I sense this is why St Peter felt so distressed at being asked even a third time if he loved the Lord: *“My actions have spoken for me. How can I be sure that I will never betray Jesus again”?*

St Peter had been afraid of his identification with Jesus. After Supper, on the night of his betrayal, Peter denied that he knew the identity of Jesus, and so he denied himself, his priestly identity. The same in the life of any priest. We tend to back away from Jesus when the conformity becomes too exacting. We seem to be losing ourselves in the identity of Another. Yet, it should make us rejoice to confess: *“I live, now not I, but Christ lives within me.”* Instead, it might frighten us. We deny that we know *“the Man:”* Christ’s identity and our own.

When I look back over these 49 years of priesthood; spouses on their anniversaries might ask the same one question which answers all others: *“Do you love me? Do you love me more than all others?”* Not “Where were you on the night I was betrayed? Where were you when I needed you?” But, “Do you love me.”?

Today’s celebration answers *“who am I to Jesus?”* who are spouse to each other?”and *“who Jesus is to us?”* Both the one who questions and the one who answers reveal themselves to each other. As we journey through life, we, as earthen vessels, have been filled with the treasures of *the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from God,* with whom we are identified not merely by a resemblance born of familiarity, but by a conformity of love.

Today’s feast is a celebration of deep redemption. The love of God can take any human weakness and turn it into strength; any fear gives cause to courage; any sorrow gives place to joy—by God’s grace.

