

SS Peter and Paul the Apostles

Such is their prominence in the Christian calendar - unlike the other apostles, Saints Peter and Paul are assigned a special feast-day all to themselves.

In the gospel we see where Jesus made Peter Head of the Church, He and his successors were to be the focal point of unity and orthodoxy in the Church throughout history, preserving it from error. The authority which Jesus conferred on Peter, despite his sins and failings, is now invested in Pope Francis. The Pope may be infallible but he's not impeccable. It seems to me, however that when it comes to moral issues confronting people today everyone is infallible - except the Pope.

St Paul came from a different stable. We all know about his dramatic conversion but before that, he was a terror to the early church. He'd be the last person we'd have chosen for a missionary role. God's ways are not our ways.

St Paul is without doubt the great missionary. Pope Paul VI, who was beatified last October, used to say that the Church exists in order to be missionary. I would say that sometimes here in England and Ireland we're more into maintenance than mission. That will need to change if we are to take on the growing secularization of our times which sees God as redundant or unnecessary. This is particularly true of our European culture.

Whether you voted Brexit or not, all I do know is that the EU has never acknowledged the great contribution the Catholic Church has made to its Christian culture. The EU, when formulating its recent constitution, didn't give the Church even a mention even though it contributed more than any other body towards European civilization throughout the ages.

Since Pope Francis, the Successor of St Peter, burst on to the scene in 2013, people have been touched by his warmth, his openness, his simple life-style but some have frowned on some of his eyebrow-raising off-the-cuff remarks to the press which seemed to somewhat dilute catholic teaching. In saying that the Pope has never denied catholic teaching. If people fail to live up to its teaching he wants us to look on them through the eyes of mercy, not judgement.

Saints Peter and Paul never tried to hide their failures or struggles. St Peter once asked our Lord to leave him because he was a sinful man after the miracle of the fish. He wept bitterly after disowning Jesus in the early hours of Good Friday. He may have momentarily deserted Jesus but Jesus didn't disown him.

St Paul was even more candid. He said that he was merciless in persecuting the early church, doing a great deal of damage to it. He even said once that he wasn't worthy to be called an apostle. He condoned the murder of St Stephen without even a twinge of conscience.

Despite their weaknesses, Saints Peter and Paul eventually proved their worth. They never left us in doubt, however, that it was by the grace of God, and not their own strength, that they eventually became the great apostles they were. Their love for their master would lead to martyrdom.

Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified in Rome about 64/65 A.D.

Saints Peter and Paul pray for us.