

21A

All the apostles are mentioned in Holy Scripture but only Peter is singled out by Jesus for a specialised role. He is without doubt the most iconic figure of the early Church.

In the gospel we see where Jesus made Peter Head of the Church, He and his successors were to be its focal point of unity and orthodoxy 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 Reformation tried to suppress the role of the Successor of Peter but throughout history he has stood head a shoulders over any other religious figure. When Pope Frances, for instance, went to Brazil for Word Youth Day a few years ago, a million young people were present at his Mass. Who else could attract such a crowd?

When Peter first set foot in Rome it was the centre of the Earth. All roads lead to Rome, they used say. Whether you voted Brexit or not, all I do know is that the EU has never acknowledged the great contribution the Church and Papacy has made to European culture. There may have been a few dodgy popes throughout its 2000 year history but the saintly ones far outweigh the dubious ones. The Pope may be infallible but he's never claimed to be impeccable, as Peter, the first Pope knew only too well. The Church contributed massively towards European civilization which is rarely acknowledged and even forcefully rejected by her enemies.

Saints Peter never tried to hide his human failures or struggles. He once asked our Lord to leave him because he was a sinful man. That was after the miraculous catch of fish. And then He wept bitterly after disowning Jesus in the early hours of Good Friday.

Despite his weakness, St Peter in due course came to realise that it was the grace of God and not his own strength which saw him through many difficulties. Peter struggled quite a bit with this early on when, for instance, he refused point blank to have Jesus wash his feet at the last Supper or when, after fishing hard all night and catching nothing, he felt embarrassed but a word from Jesus changed all that when his boat was filled to sinking point. Peter had to give up the idea of doing everything his way in place of God's.

Peter's love for Jesus was the stimulus for his mission which would culminate in laying down his life for Him. It was only after Peter declared his love for Jesus that he received his special commission to lead his church and hand on the keys of his office to his successor.

With so much falsehood being peddled around these days regarding the human person and the moral life in particular, we need Peter more than ever to keep us firmly anchored in the truth. It was Christ Himself who invested Him with this special authority which has withstood the test of time. Without the Papacy the church would be severed from its roots and no longer command the respect of all people of goodwill.