

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 on faith and moral issues but he's not impeccable. However, sometimes you get the impression that when it comes to issues of faith a morals today everyone is infallible, except the Pope.

St Paul background was quite different. We all know about his dramatic conversion but before that, he was a terror to the early church. Because of his record he'd be the last person we'd have chosen for a missionary role. God's ways are not always our ways. Because of a person's background or their history we must never write anyone off either.

St Paul is without doubt the great missionary. Pope Paul VI, who was canonized a Saint recently, used to say that the Church exists in order to be missionary. I would say that sometimes here in England and Ireland we've settled more for maintenance than mission but maybe the coronavirus will jolt us out of our complacency. We need to be more missionary to confront the growing secularization of our western culture, especially here in Europe.

Many people may bemoan leaving the E.U. but we sure won't be any the worse for it as far as the christian faith is concerned.

The Catholic Church may have contributed more than any other body towards European civilization throughout the ages but's that's airbrushed out of the E.U.'s present constitution.

Saints Peter and Paul never tried to hide their failures or struggles. St Peter once asked our Lord to leave him because he was such a sinful man. This was after he witnessed the miracle of the fish. He wept bitterly after disowning Jesus in the early hours of Good Friday. He may have momentarily deserted Jesus through human weakness, but never malice - Jesus knew there was more to Peter than that.

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

Despite their weaknesses, Saints Peter and Paul proved they were men of faith. They never left us in doubt, however, that it was by the grace of God, and not their own strength, that they eventually became iconic figures in the early church. Jesus said to Peter: 'Satan had wanted to sift you like wheat but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail and you will go on to strengthen the faith of the other disciples. St Paul said: 'I can do all things by the power of the one who gives me strength – by the grace of God I am what I am'. To prove their love, they laid down their lives for their master.

Paul was beheaded and Peter crucified in Rome about 64/65 A.D. Saints Peter and Paul pray for us.