

SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

Cycle A

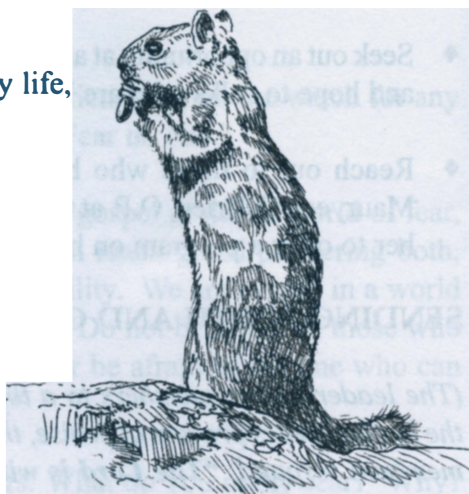
Acts 12:1-11
Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18
Matthew 16:13-19

(Pictures of people from various life circumstances, ethnic groups and cultures rest on a table in the gathering place. A large heart cut from paper – with the name Jesus written on it – rests on top of the pictures.)

OPENING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to some time of quiet attention to God's presence. After several minutes, members alternate praying each verse.)

- I: When did you first
 weave your way into my life,
 Beloved?
- II: When did you first
 entice me
 with your contagious
 colors of love?
- III: When did the mystery
 of your kindness stir
 so strongly
 I could no longer deny your grace?
- IV: I do not know the precise moment
 perhaps there never was one.
- V: More, it seems to me,
 are the countless times,



endless ways, you enter,
thread by thread,
the pattern of my days,
your presence inaudibly
interlacing my every moment.

VI: Your whispers and sighs,
Your breathy voice
in the ear of my heart,
persuading me into your embrace.

VII: Please, Beloved,
never stop encouraging me.

VIII: Draw me daily
into the sanctuary
of your enduring love.

Joyce Rupp, *Prayer*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2007.

(Some quiet instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the leader prays as follows.)

Leader: O Mystery of Kindness, Beloved, draw us daily with the
markings of your enduring love.

All: Amen.

COMMENTARY

Peter and Paul are great apostles to whom Jesus entrusted his mission of spreading the good news to all people. Odd choices it would seem, as both men either denied or rejected Jesus. Following Jesus' arrest Peter vigorously denied any connection to Jesus. After the crucifixion he hid with the other disciples, afraid that they too would be arrested and killed. Early on, Paul's job was to persecute Jews who believed in Jesus. He stood by and held the cloak of those who stoned Stephen, the first martyr. And yet they were to become men whose lives were centered in Jesus. We honor them as saints.



Peter and Paul were very different from each other, as were their experiences of Jesus. Peter, a fisherman, was one of the twelve called by Jesus at the start of his ministry. He remained with Jesus throughout the three years of his ministry. In the gospels, Peter is portrayed as impetuous and as questioning, not always sure of what is going on with Jesus. But Peter loves Jesus, despite his confusion over what he is all about.

Paul was a well-educated Jew, who knew the Jewish scriptures and customs. His life was an example of one who worshiped and upheld God's law and his justice. He was passionate about seeing to it that the scriptures and customs were obeyed. He believed Jesus was a threat and disruptive influence in the Jewish community. Although Paul had never met the earthly Jesus, he believed that those who did follow him needed to be stopped.

Jesus saw the weaknesses and faults of both Peter and Paul. He saw what they could become. Jesus realized that their giftedness was exactly what was needed to ensure that his mission would not be lost and forgotten. He knew that through the Holy Spirit, Peter and Paul would become zealous about spreading the good news.

Both apostles experienced a conversion that changed their focus. Jesus became the center of their lives. All their talents, gifts, and their very lives were placed in and for God's service. Their strength was their God. Their strength of belief and love of Jesus radiated out and was the cause of conversion for others.

God calls us to the same conversion embraced by Peter and Paul. He calls us to make Jesus the center of our lives. Whatever our own limits and former denial or betrayal of Jesus, he calls us to put our gifts and our very lives at the service of the good news. The more deeply we embrace conversion of heart and mind and life, the more fully we participate in extending Jesus' mission of drawing others to acceptance of God's overwhelming love for us all.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Reflect on becoming aware of God's love for you.
- ◆ How deep is your conversion? How is it changing your life?

- ◆ Share ways in which you continue to nourish your faith.
- ◆ What of your gifts and talents are you putting to God's service these days?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ We hear in Acts that while Peter was in prison, "prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf." Send a card to your pastor or bishop or both offering your prayer for their ministry.
- ◆ Offer to serve in some way to support those who are preparing for baptism or reception into the church in your parish.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection about your own conversion of heart, mind and life. Pray for God's love to overtake you more fully. Make one change in your life in response.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader calls the community to some minutes of silent prayer. After a time of quiet, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: The promises of the LORD I will sing forever,
 through all generations my mouth shall proclaim your
 faithfulness.
 For you have said, "My kindness is established forever";
 in heaven you have confirmed your faithfulness.

All: For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Leader: Blessed the people who know the joyful shout;
 in the light of your countenance, O LORD, they walk.
 At your name they rejoice all the day,
 and through your justice they are exalted.

All: For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Leader: You are the splendor of their strength,
and by your favor our horn is exalted.
For to the LORD belongs our shield,
and to the Holy One of Israel, our king.

All: For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19

(The session concludes with the praying of The Lord's Prayer and the exchange of a sign of peace.)

