

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 everyone is infallible today, except the Pope.

St Paul's background was quite different. We all know about his striking conversion when Our Lord appeared to Him on the road 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. But God's ways are not always our ways. Can we recall small moments of conversion in our lives?

St Paul is without doubt the great missionary. St Pope Paul VI, said in one of his encyclicals the Church exists in order to be missionary. I would say that sometimes we're inclined more towards maintenance than mission but things are slowly changing. In this week's bulletin for instance we have advertised two local mission events one in the Cathedral and the other in St Mary's, Spinkhill. Would it ever cross your mind to attend these?

We need to be more missionary to confront the growing secularization of our western culture, especially in Europe. The church in Verona I went to last Sunday is about five or six times the size of this church but between two masses they only had about 120 people. The church could easily hold 7 or 8 hundred. I thought to myself 'thank God for St Vincent's'.

The Catholic Church may have contributed more than any other body towards European civilization over the centuries but that's airbrushed out of the E.U.'s present constitution and replaced by such things as a constitutional right to an abortion which says a lot about their priorities.

Saints Peter and Paul never tried to hide their failures. Peter wept bitterly after disowning Jesus in the early hours of Good Friday. He may have momentarily disowned Him through human weakness, but never malice. Jesus, however, had bigger plans in store for him like making him head of His budding church.

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

Despite their weaknesses, Peter and Paul proved their worth. We are never left in any doubt that it was by the grace of God, and not their own strength, that they eventually became the great apostles they were. St Paul said: 'I can do all things by the power of the one who give me strength – by the grace of God I am what I am'. To prove their love, they laid down their lives for their master. Their bones have been found under the high altars of the two great basilicas dedicated to their names in Rome.

Saints Peter and Paul pray for us.