

## THE SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

**Opening prayer:** *Loving God, we gather today to prepare ourselves to celebrate the solemn feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. Both of these pillars of our church proclaimed the gospel of Jesus with deep faith and without fear. Strengthen us with this same faith that we may fearlessly witness to your gospel values by word and deed. This we pray through Christ, our Lord, Amen.*

**Sharing Life:** What are you most and least grateful for this week?

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** The solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul honors two great saints who, between them, represent the Church's mission to both Jews (Peter's leadership was exercised from the Jerusalem church) and Gentiles (Paul is known as the "apostle to the Gentiles"). Saint Peter, who is called by Jesus "rock," and who is revered by Catholics as the first Pope, enjoys first place among the apostles and has a profound significance for the Church. St. Paul is likewise a towering figure, whose theological genius, evangelical fervor, and tireless pastoral ministry were so instrumental in the founding of the Christian religion. When we honor Peter and Paul, in truth we honor the Church as well, for their contributions have forever marked the faith and life of God's people.

If you have not read the commentary before your gathering, consider reading it before or after each reading.

### FIRST READING: Acts 12:1-11

This reading tells the story of Peter's dramatic escape from prison. The way Luke describes Peter's security was intended to accentuate the divine element in his release. He was guarded by, "four squads of four soldiers". He was made to sleep between two soldiers and fastened with double chains. Suddenly, through the intervention of an angel, Peter effortlessly walks free. Notice also, how Luke mentions the community's 'fervent prayer to God' on behalf of Peter.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 34

This psalm celebrates a faith response suitable to the crisis narrated in the first reading.

### SECOND READING: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

In this letter, Paul is writing to his friend and protégé Timothy, while imprisoned in Rome. He is not sure he will win his case and this causes him to reflect on his life. Paul uses three colorful metaphors to speak about his life and the rigors of his discipleship. *First*, Paul, the great Apostle, compares the total gift of himself in God's service to a libation poured out in honor of the one true God. *Second*, Paul speaks of his possible imminent death as a time of 'departure'. The Greek word *analsis* for departure was a word used to speak about the unyoking of an animal from a plow. For Paul, death would unyoke him from the burdens of this life and free him to enjoy his eternal rest. *Third*, Paul uses athletic terms to speak of his life and death. Like a good athlete, Paul has "fought the good fight and finished the race". Satisfied that he has played the "game of good discipleship" well, Paul feels confidence that the eternal rest awaits him and all those who are faithful to their covenant with Christ. Paul's epitaph might read: "*Paul, faithful servant of the Lord Jesus.*"

### GOSPEL: Matthew 16:13-19

This gospel is frequently called Peter's confession of faith the true identity of Jesus. When asked the question concerning: "Who do *you* say that I am"? Peter answers: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." In answering thus, Peter is reminded that his response was sheer grace or divinely prompted. In response to Peter's confession, Jesus confers on him a new title "Rock" on which Jesus will build his church. And the "gates of the netherworld" (i.e., the arena of sin, evil and death) will not prevail or destroy the new community Jesus is founding to continue his work. Jesus also gives to Peter a special teaching role and authority: "whatever he binds on earth will be held bound and whatever he loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This means in the context of today's celebration, the central importance of Peter's ability to proclaim the true identity of Jesus stands out as the key element

of the passage. Peter is the one who names Jesus the Messiah, and is thus named by him "the rock" on which he will build his Church.

### **FAITH SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. What verse, idea or image spoke to you most in the readings? Why?
2. What are your thoughts/feelings about St. Peter?
3. What are your thoughts/feelings about St. Paul?
4. Who are the pillars of our church today?

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

Name one way you can act on today's scriptures. Suggestion: Pray for the Pope, bishops and missionaries.

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION ©**