

A Joyful Song

Homily Hints-June 29, 2014 Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

If you are ever in central Kentucky, one place to visit is the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani near Bardstown. Since its foundation in 1848, Gethsemani has been a profound witness to monastic life, show cased most notably in the prolific writings of its most famous member, Thomas Merton. By all estimates, Fr. Thomas had his struggles as well as his triumphs in the cloister. One of the former was his relationship with Dom James Fox, Merton's abbot. Personality struggles abound, especially in an enclosed environment, but who could have predicted that both Merton and Fox would ultimately be buried side by side. To those who knew them, their geographical positions at the abbey cemetery is a good example of divine (and a bit of monastic) humor.

Celebrating the Solemnity of Peter and Paul is probably another example of God's comic side, but also of the church's wisdom. Could we find two more important examples of apostolic witness in the New Testament? Probably not. Similar in importance, however, they differ greatly in kind. Peter was shaky and faltering and famously denied the Lord at the time Jesus needed him the most. But he was redeemed by a steadfast faith, so steadfast that he worked and preached mightily to keep safe the traditions and membership of the infant church secure, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles. On the other hand, there is Paul, who, by his own admission, was a murderer-turned-evangelist who reached out to the Gentiles and brilliantly found a way to explain the Law's transformation into the Spirit of the living and risen Christ. One worked with sanctifying the insiders and preserving sacred tradition; the other invited the outsider into a new world, reimagining the force of that tradition.

Yet both Peter and Paul responded to Jesus' plea: "Feed my lambs." Though very different, we would be hard pressed to find two other men who loved Jesus more. Responding to that love, the Lord seems to have led both Peter and Paul by an invisible, divine hand moving one to various homes and places after his conversion and boosting the other out of prison and chains. Neither Peter nor Paul had any doubt as to who the Son of Man was at the end of their lives. Perhaps this is why, despite their different approaches, and there are ways of thinking about these two apostles in similar fashion, as two sides of the same coin (a coin that is not Caesar's but Christ's!). Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven so that whatever he "loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." But Christ gave Paul the keys as well, the keys to understanding his call as "a revelation from Jesus Christ," the keys to unlock the grace that was given to him in God's Son and the keys to pass on to others, the Gentiles, so that they might inherit the kingdom promised by the Lord. When it comes to the responsorial psalm refrain used for the Vigil mass, that joyful song we sing applies to both Peter and Paul: "Their message goes out through all the earth."

When you join in this joyful song, you will know that...

YOU ARE LOVED

DEACON DAN

Thanks to Guerric DeBona, OSB