



Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul



Date: Sunday, June 29, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Acts 12:1–11

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 34:2–9 | **Response:** Psalm 34:5

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 17–18

Gospel Acclamation: Matthew 16:18

Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:13–19

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

My brothers in the Lord,

Today, the Church pauses her rhythm to honour two lives at her foundation. Two apostles. Two martyrs. Two men—so different in story, yet so united in surrender. Peter and Paul.

One was a fisherman—earthy, impulsive, unsure of his strength. The other, a Pharisee—sharp of mind, steeped in law, once a fierce persecutor of the Church. One denied Jesus in fear. The other tried to crush His followers.

Yet Jesus called them both. Not because they were worthy, but because they were willing to be changed.

This is the grace we mark today: not what they achieved, but what God accomplished in them. They were not perfect. They were remade—by mercy, by mission, by the love of Christ who never abandons. As *Lumen Gentium* teaches, the Church is both holy and always in need of purification. Peter and Paul embody this.

Before they became builders, they were broken. And that is where we begin.

In Acts (12:1–11), Peter is in prison. Chained. Guarded. His future uncertain. Outside, the Church is not protesting. They are praying.

Then—light. A messenger. A nudge. The chains fall. The gate swings open. Peter walks out—not because the system changed, but because heaven entered his cell.

Why didn't God stop the arrest? Why not prevent the pain? God does not always shield us from struggle. He joins us in it. As Pope John Paul II wrote in *Salvifici Doloris*, suffering “unleashes love”—from others, and from God who suffers with us. Peter's freedom came not through a reversal of circumstances, but through a revelation of presence.

Peter's story echoes here. The chains are still real. In Zimbabwe, they look like youth unemployment, the rising cost of living, and a fragile health system. Corruption, distrust, disillusionment—these are modern chains.

Yet still, the Church is called to pray. Not to escape the world, but to bear it. And we—as men formed in the Exercises, schooled in discernment, vowed to the greater glory of God—are called to listen, to kneel, and to act.

And we must lift our eyes beyond our borders. Today, we remember Gaza, where relentless violence has taken a devastating toll. More than 80 lives were lost just yesterday! The grief is immense. Yet we are not powerless. As Pope Leo XIV reminds us, peace is never the product of force, but the fruit of communion—of listening, truth, and courageous dialogue. To pray for peace is to believe every life matters to God—and must matter to us.

Prayer is not retreat. It is engagement. It is where despair melts and courage begins to take root.

“I sought the Lord,” the Psalmist says (Psalm 34), “and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.”

It does not promise escape from hardship. But it does promise freedom from fear—and fear is often the deepest chain of all.

The miracle is not always in the opening of the gate. Sometimes, it is the stillness of heart while we wait in the dark.

Now Paul. In 2 Timothy (4:6–8, 17–18), he writes from captivity. His final words. No regret. Only peace.

“I am already being poured out like a libation,” he writes. “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”

This is not bravado. It is offering. Eucharistic language—poured out, spent, given.

Paul's life was hard. Beaten, betrayed, misunderstood. Yet he speaks of blessing. The Gospel is not a ladder to climb. It is a path to walk—into service, surrender, and self-giving love.

This is not failure. It is faithfulness. And in that, Paul found joy—not shallow joy, but deep rooted joy.

In Matthew's Gospel (16:13–19), Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?"

And Peter—stumbling, uncertain Peter—replies: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus doesn't praise his intellect. He blesses his openness. "This was not revealed to you by flesh and blood," He says, "but by my Father."

It is not brilliance or brokenness alone that builds the Church. It is hearts willing to be transformed. God uses both.

Jesus takes Simon—'he who has heard'—and renames him Peter, the rock. He entrusts him with something lasting.

This is the Gospel's rhythm. God chooses the unlikely. He lifts the lowly. He makes strength out of surrender.

If Peter is the rock, Paul is the flame. One anchors. One advances. And we need both. We, who are called to hold the centre and move to the margins. To discern and to decide. To accompany and to be sent.

So what does this mean for us, as Jesuits in Zimbabwe?

We must stop measuring our lives by our limitations, and begin again from grace. We must be men of roots and men of the road. Of silence and of speech. Of consolation and of uncomfortable love.

Our country doesn't need louder voices. It needs deeper roots. It doesn't need performance. It needs prayer. It needs companions of Jesus who are willing to be spent—not for prestige, but for the poor. Not for applause, but for love.

Who will be Peter today—bold enough to confess Christ with their life? Who will be Paul—ready to speak when silence is safer?

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us: the dignity of the human person is not a theory. It is a truth that costs. Peter and Paul gave their lives for it. As *Fratelli Tutti* says, “Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally.” That Body includes every unemployed graduate, every mother walking for clean water, every child in a crowded classroom, every grandparent raising another generation.

How do we live this? With personal conversion—daily, humble, sincere. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, “Charity in truth... requires us to be attentive to the needs of others, to work for justice and the common good.”

Then we act: we discern apostolic priorities with the poor at the centre. We accompany those on the margins. We educate and form consciences. We offer what we have, in the Ignatian spirit, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

If we are to be the Church in Zimbabwe today, we will not be built on marble, but on mercy. On ordinary lives turned outward by grace.

But this does not begin in the street. It begins in the soul.

St Ignatius asks us not just to admire the saints, but to enter their stories. To see where their story touches ours.

So let us ask ourselves:

- If I were Peter, woken by a whisper in the dark, would I walk through the open door—or stay with my chains?
- If I were Paul, writing my final words, what would I say I lived for?
- What fear, what silence, what comfort is God asking me to step beyond?
- And what concrete action can I take this week—perhaps to support a companion in living out these ideals?

Because the truth is: we are all part Peter and part Paul—fragile, fiery, stumbling, searching. But grace is never deterred by that. It begins there.

Christ builds His Church not on the perfect, but on those willing to be changed.

So let us stand with Peter. Let us speak with Paul. Let us pray as the early Church prayed, and live as they lived.

Not with triumph. But with trust. Not for show. But for love.

And the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Saints Peter and Paul, pray for us. Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-06jun-29-yc-ot-13/>

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