

Homily
June 29, 2025
Ss. Peter & Paul
24:44-38:58

You all look marvelous this morning.

Ironically, this very day in 1982 in Tell City, I began pastoral ministry as a deacon. What followed was 42 years of priesthood. But it all started on this day, celebrating Saints Peter and Paul. I was a brand new deacon and I was in a church in which I had never served. So, I turned to the two servers, who were 7th-graders, I think.

And I said to them, “Guys, I’m brand new. I’ve never served here as a server or a deacon. So I need your help. Can you show me what to do?”

“Sure, Deacon Rick!” And off we went. They showed me everything and during the liturgy, periodically they would look at me and go (shaking his head). (laughter) And then when they figured that wasn’t helping, one of them would walk up and say, “Put it right here.” (pointing)

It was a wonderful moment, beginning in a place far, far away. Tell City is 165 miles south of here as the crow flies. If you want to get there, take Indiana 37, avoid I-69, take it all the way to the Ohio River, and there it is.

In 1993, Archbishop Buechlein asked me to serve at the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. And for the next 12 years we moved the feast of Saints Peter and Paul to Sunday. Why? Because it was our patronal feast. How could we do that? Well, guess what. In Ordinary Time, you can move your patronal feast to a Sunday. You can’t do that in Advent, Lent, Easter – or what’s the other one? – Christmas! (laughter) Not allowed to. So for 12 years, this feast was very much a part of my life.

And now, 2025: the last weekend to celebrate Mass as a pastor. The feast of Peter and Paul.

Peter and Paul.

What's in a name, my brothers and sisters? Saul becomes Paul. Simon becomes Peter, or in Aramaic, Cephas. In the Old Testament, the act of giving a name is one of creating, or "naming for purpose." That would be Peter.

There is also a practical change of name for ministry. That would be Paul.

Simon Peter was first known as Simeon. This variation possibly reflects the well-known custom among Jews at the time of giving a name of a famous patriarch, or personage of the Old Testament to a male child. Thus, Simeon. Along with a similar-sounding Greek-Roman name, he was also known as "Simon."

And then, as in today's Gospel, in Aramaic, "Keffa," which means, "rock or stone." And in Greek and Latin, "Petros," which also means, "rock." When applied to this man, who is now Peter, the name itself means, "rough or tough character." Does that sound right for Peter? We'll get to that.

Paul, first known as "Saul," perhaps named after the biblical king, King Saul, the first king of Israel and also a member of the tribe of Benjamin. His Latin name, "Paulus," means "small." (I have never thought of Paul as small. Not in attitude, passion, or anything. But, that was his name.)

It was typical of Jews at that time to have two names: one Hebrew, "Saul." The other, Latin or Greek, Paul. They are used interchangeably by the author of Luke and Acts. But apparently, Paul's preference was, "Paul."

Using his Roman name was typical of Paul's missionary style. His method was to put people at ease and approach them with his message in a language and style that was relatable to them. It was a conscious choice. Not to deny his Jewish background, but to be a better minister to the people of God as he encountered them.

These two were very different.

Peter, a fisherman. He worked with his hands. He got wet a lot. He had to knit his nets. And he worked with a bunch of other rough and tumble fellows. He was chosen by Jesus on the lake shore, when he said, "Follow me."

And as his name infers, he was coarse. He was rough. He was also straightforward, out-spoken, with a simple common longing for the Messiah. As we heard, "You are the Christ. The Son of the living God."

And he was impulsive. He could be swayed under duress. Recall the courtyard denials. And at the same time, recall how he would eat with the Gentiles, yet refrain from this same practice when he was amidst those Jews who wished any Gentile Christian to be fully Jewish. And guess who called him out on that...Paul.

Paul from Tarsus. He was a Roman citizen. He was highly educated, as a Pharisee. He had great knowledge of the Scriptures, the Old Testament, the teachings of the rabbis and Covenant Law. He was not rough and tumble. Just sometimes rough of tongue.

He was fiery, passionate as persecutor of the earliest Jewish Christians, and later as a Missionary. He was known for having companions in ministry: Silas, Barnabas, John Mark. And he was a prolific writer of letters in Greek and Hebrew.

Ironically, both of these very different people, one, Peter, the apostle to the Jewish community, along with James and John, others; and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. Both died under the Emperor Nero. Peter was crucified, upside down. Tradition has it that he told them, "I am not worthy to be crucified the way my Lord was." And Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded.

What is their legacy? The Church, in the name of Jesus Christ. Synods and Councils flow from them as in the First Council of Jerusalem. But always, always, always, whatever they did, preached, taught was about Jesus. He was the center. They were not. They followed the Baptist. "He must increase. I must decrease."

Two thousand years of descendants they have created from so many different peoples, languages, parts of the world. And most recently, we see the contrast of one Pope, with the new: Francis and Leo.

Oh, they're similar in many ways, but we knew Francis and now we're getting to know Leo. Each brought something unique from their past, their location, where they were raised, and their care for the people of God.

Both are from the Americas. Who would have ever thought? One, Argentina, the other...Chicago? (Okay. I'm glad the people of Chicago were not "voting" for the pope because some of them would have been dead when they voted.)

They were both called to serve, to bring their backgrounds, their passions, their beliefs, their ideals to the people of God. One has completed that journey. The other is newly set upon it.

And then this week, my brothers and sisters, in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, on Wednesday at noon, there's going to be a lot of people traveling. Priests, disciples of Christ traveling to a new parish, or parishes. They're bringing unique gifts, talents, passions, hopes and please God, a listening ear – willing to learn of God's people as they are in a particular parish and embrace what they learn and become part of the community even as they are the spiritual leader of the community.

A lot going on.

What a wonderful time to reflect on Peter and Paul. And to know that the differences are part of the diversity, which creates the unity.

And there is you and I. (And that's the correct grammar.) You and I. For nine years, we have had the blessing: the blessing of spending time, ministry, laughter, tears, great spiritual moments and – broken pipes, tanks in the ground, you name it.

This is a unique community of the people of God. This is a unique community of faithful believers. Keep at it, my brothers and sisters. Be who you are here on the East Side,

cooperating with the other member churches of the East Deanery, especially Little Flower, even as you maintain your unique character. For the diversity leads to unity, which is so important in this age, when to be One is extraordinary.

May you do it well.

And I guess I've got to let a woman finally into my life, to tell me what to do on a regular basis. [Esther, I know you're watching. (That's number 3.) Please do not tell Mary I threw her under the bus. Thank you very much.]