

+ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

From as early as the year 258 evidence appears of a tradition of celebrating together Peter and Paul as apostles and martyrs. Together they are founders of the see of Rome, in recognition of their preaching, ministry and martyrdom there.

In Peter, Jesus' friend and the one who recognised him for who was and proclaimed him as Messiah, we see a very human, very fallible figure. Apart from Peter's profound insight into the person of Jesus, he is beset with failure. It was Peter who, having just proclaimed the real identity of Jesus tells him he must not fulfill his destiny and die in Jerusalem. It was Peter who lost faith when Jesus walked on water. It was Peter who denied Jesus on the night he was handed over for punishment and death. Still Jesus chose him to be the shepherd of the flock of followers, the lambs and sheep of today's gospel passage, and he proclaimed him the rock upon which the church would be built. And upon that rock even the gates of Hades would not prevail. Peter was martyred by crucifixion in the year 64. He insisted on being crucified upside down because he did not believe himself worthy enough to die in the same way as his Lord. St Peter's Basilica in Rome was built over his tomb. This basilica became the Vatican, the seat of pope, the Bishop of Rome, to this day.

Paul was known as the apostle to the gentiles. In the beginning he was Saul, a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians. He was present at the stoning of Stephen. One day on the road to Damascus Paul was confronted with an encounter with Jesus and was chastened for his violent actions. Immediately he knew it was a divine encounter and recognised the same Lord as the Christians worshipped. He repented and was baptised. As Paul, or Paulos, his Greek name, he worked tirelessly in the service of the church. He left a legacy of letters and the Acts of the Apostles records much of his, as well as Peter's ministry. From these documents we learn of the establishment of the church

and are given insights into the challenges which are still present with us today. Paul died in Rome in about the year 69.

Peter and Paul were both innovators. They built the church, both as its founding rock and its evangelists. People resisted and rejected them, especially the conservative Jews. These did not want anything to change, especially that their privileged place as God's favoured people be jeopardised by the inclusion of the gentiles in the divine intention for human salvation.

Peter and Paul made enormous sacrifices, learned new ways of doing things to accommodate the people who were becoming followers of Jesus. Many of these new people were not Jews. They came from Greek and Roman pagan backgrounds. They were not circumcised. They did not have specific rituals around cleanliness, they ate things Jews did not eat, and they did not observe the Sabbath. You can read in Acts all about the issues these alternative behaviours caused. Even Peter and Paul came into conflict over these things, so strongly were they felt by Jewish people. In Galatians 2.11-14 Paul condemns Peter for refusing to eat with gentiles for fear of the circumcision faction, those Jews who maintained that gentiles could not be true Jesus followers without keeping the customs of the Jews.

Into the cultural melting pot of the new church many ingredients were thrown – Jews, pagans, many different languages, many customs, lots of ideas about how the church should be, and many egos. It took people with the charisma and determination of Paul and Peter to faithfully lead the Christian communities with courage as they developed across the Graeco-Roman world. These communities were in the beginning dependent on oral traditions, with very few written documents of the life and ministry of Jesus.

We live in a very different time. We do have the stories of Jesus written for us. We have centuries of church tradition, of liturgy, song and doctrine. We have a highly developed structure of church leadership and organisation across the

whole world. Yet in many ways, at least here in Australia, the challenges are the same as they were in the time of Peter and Paul.

Beyond the church community, in the wide world of secularism, rampant consumerism and individualism, where Jesus is either unknown, has been rejected, or has been forgotten, there are a new age of gentiles. These people have as many customs and languages and ideas as the people did in the apostles' time. They do not all think church should be conducted in the same way, a bit like how some Jews believed the church should be run just like the synagogue, with all the rules and regulations of the system that had worked for centuries before across Judaism. Many now beyond the church community think the church has not kept up with the times, that it no longer has any relevance.

And sometimes we do hold onto things just because they have always been done that way. We may be reluctant to look for new ways, perhaps for fear that doing things differently will mean losing them altogether. Perhaps that is what the Jewish followers of Jesus thought when Paul admonished some of them for insisting on keeping certain rituals and laws.

In our worship there will always be preparation, praise, song, scripture, interpretation, confession, absolution, prayer, sacrament and blessing. These, put together, make up the structure of Anglican worship. I feel confident that most people in the church here today love these things. These are fundamental to our approach to God in church. Some of the trappings around these things will change as we move into the future, however. Some of our language and inground ways of conducting church have become remote from how people in the great big world of new gentiles can understand.

Christianity is fundamentally different from Judaism in that it is a missionary religion. Christians actively engage in making new disciples, according to the great commission of Jesus in Matthew 28. We must take care as faithful people

that our well-accustomed practices of approach to God do not become more important than the reason for being here as the body of Christ.

As church transforms it must enable worship to be clearer and more accessible for everyone, including the new gentiles, while holding on to the fundamental aspects of tradition. Simplicity is the most beautiful language of God. It was the intention of Paul and Peter to make inclusion in the community of Jesus followers simple, the message clear. It is an intention I pray we may regain, even if hordes of new believers do not come rushing through the doors. I pray that we may do it to honour God.

I'd like to finish by quoting some lines which Augustine of Hippo wrote in the year 395 about Peter and Paul: "Both apostles share the same feast day, for these two were one; and even though they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first and Paul followed. And so we celebrate this day made holy for us by the apostles' blood. Let us embrace what they believed, their life, their labours, their sufferings, their preaching, and their confession of faith." Amen.