

The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles  
St. Matthew 16:13-20  
June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

## Who Do You Say That I Am?

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

### **Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

As you have heard me say many times the Church celebrates by gathering together to celebrate the Holy Mass. The Church celebrates by having church; by gathering around the Word of God and participating in the Blessed Sacrament. We celebrate by joining together in fellowship on bended knee at this altar to eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Lord + Jesus Christ in bread and wine. This is how the Church has always celebrated: by gathering together as the people of God around the Word of God to hear Him preach into our ears the good news of salvation found in Him alone.

We are gathered here, as the Church in this place, to celebrate our Feast of Title: The Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles. We also celebrate the anniversary of our parish. For it customary, as has been practiced throughout the history of the Church, to celebrate the anniversary of a parish on the festival with which it shares a name. This is known as the liturgical anniversary. And, if it is not named after one of the festivals of the Church's year, then its liturgical anniversary would be celebrated on the closest festival, or Sunday, of the parish's foundation. Our parish was formed on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013, so it ends up that our Feast of Title is close to the founding date of our parish. That is to say, our liturgical anniversary, and our actual anniversary are very close.

Our parish was named for two of the great Apostles: Saints Peter and Paul. They share a festival in the Church's year—they are celebrated together on this day—because according to Church tradition they were both martyred on this day, June 29<sup>th</sup>. As I mentioned earlier, there is some debate about whether that martyrdom occurred on the same day in the same year, or on the same day in different years. I believe the evidence supports that they were martyred on the same day in the same year, because the Caesar at that time, Nero, was doing a "spring cleaning" of all Christian "agitators," and many Christians were slaughtered during his time. This was after the burning of Rome in 64 AD, which Nero did himself, but to save himself from blame, he blamed the Christians, and they felt the brunt of his lunacy. Therefore, St. Paul was beheaded and St. Peter was crucified upside down, as per his request.

So, today we celebrate their feast day, the anniversary date of their deaths. On this day, we hear from both of these Apostles. At first glance it seems that only St. Peter has his words shared with us. He is the main focus of both the Epistle reading from the Book of Acts, and he is the main focus of the Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Matthew. But we also hear from St. Paul today on this feast

day, for his words to St. Timothy are recorded for us in the *Gradual*. Therefore, we hear from both of these great Apostles on this their feast day. Both of them point us to the Lord + Jesus. St. Paul mentions keeping the faith, even though he is being poured out like a drink offering; even though the time of his departure is at hand. The faith that he is keeping is the faith that St. Peter confesses in the Gospel reading from the Evangelist St. Matthew. Our Lord + Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Both of these men—these Apostles—remained faithful to the faith to the point of death. For in the Lord + Jesus they knew that salvation was only to be found. Upon this faith—this rock—the Lord + Jesus laid the foundation of the Church. Our Lord + Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone. He is the way of eternal life. He is the way of forgiveness of sins. In Him alone is salvation found. The Lord + Jesus is the Messiah; the Christ. He is the Anointed One of the Lord God. He is the One Who was sent to take upon Himself our flesh. He took upon Himself our flesh—God became man—in order that He might rescue us from sin, death and the power of the devil.

This is the same faith which we confess today. This is the same faith which the true Church continues to confess today. It is on account of this faith—a desire to remain faithful to this faith even to the point of death—that this parish was formed. We desired a place where the Word of God would be preached in all of its truth and purity, regardless of what attacks and slanders we might face because of our faithfulness. We desired a place where the Blessed Sacraments were observed according to the Lord + Jesus Christ's institution. A place where those who were not in fellowship with us would not be allowed to pretend to be in fellowship with us by their participation in the Lord's Supper. We desired that the truth of the Gospel would be allowed to shine in all of its glory without the trappings of this world. Especially when it comes to the Liturgy which we use. We did not want the worldly influences invading other parishes to seep into our parish, and lead us away from the truth of the Gospel.

For the way that one worships is a sign of what one believes. We worship with all reverence our Triune Lord God, for we believe that He is actually present with us when we gather together in His Name. He is with us in His Word. He is with us in the Blessed Sacrament. He is here with us as our Chief Cornerstone. He is the foundation upon which we have built this parish. We pray that He might keep us steadfast in the faith regardless of what persecutions we may face from the world, even as He did Sts. Peter and Paul to the point of their death.

Sts. Peter and Paul suffered many things for their faithfulness. They were both imprisoned, both were beaten and whipped, both suffered ridicule and shame from the Jews and the Gentiles, and both were killed on account of their belief that the Lord + Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. They suffered for their faith in the Lord + Jesus, because they knew the answer to the question, "Who do you say that I AM?" The Lord + Jesus was the Christ of the Living God. He was the Son of the Living God. He came to make all those who believe on Him, sons of God. He came to be our Brother, and draw us into the family of the Triune Lord God.

He has prepared a place for us in Heaven by suffering and dying for us on the tree of the holy cross. His innocent sacrifice, for He was without sin having fulfilled the Law of God perfectly, serves as a ransom for many. He atoned for the sins of the whole world, so that those who cling to Him in faith—the faith created by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace—might become part of the family of God. This family is found in the Church. The Church is built upon the foundation of our Lord + Jesus Christ. The salvation that is found only in Him, is the foundation upon which the whole Christian Church on Earth is built. This house of the Triune Lord God; this Church whose foundation is the Lord + Jesus Christ, and upon Whom it is built cannot be destroyed. For the Lord + Jesus is its foundation. The gates of Hell cannot prevail against it.

Hell will, however, do everything in its power to shake this Church. The devil, the world, and our sinful flesh seek to destroy the faith implanted in us by the Word of God. They seek to turn us away

from the truths that we have been taught by the Church's steadfastness to the truth throughout her many years of persecution by her enemies of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. The Apostles Sts. Peter and Paul helped to lay the foundations of the Church by proclaiming to all who would hear that the Lord + Jesus is the One, True Foundation of the Church. He is our Chief Cornerstone. He is the foundation upon Which we have built our parish, and upon Whom we cling to in faith in all good times and bad. For He is the One Who rescues us from our enemies, and forgives all of our sins, and grants us eternal life and salvation.

Therefore, this night we gather to celebrate, as we have always done, by gathering together in worship; to celebrate the Holy Mass; to gather around the Word of God. We celebrate as the Church in this place by having church. For it is in this Church that we find the Foundation—the Rock—upon which we can build our faith. In this Church we are taught about our Lord + Jesus and what He has done for us poor, miserable sinners. In this Church the Lord + Jesus is proclaimed in all of His truth and purity. And in this Church we share a fellowship—a unity—with the Lord + Jesus, and with one another, as we come to this holy altar and receive on our lips and tongues the very Body and Blood of our Lord + Jesus Christ given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Our Lord + Jesus suffered and died for us. His Apostles Sts. Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom for their confession of Him. We too in this life will face persecution, shame, mockery, and the like, because we desire to remain faithful to the truth and purity of the Word of God and to the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments. May the Lord God Almighty preserve us steadfast in this One, True Faith until He calls us from this vale of tears to Himself in Heaven. May He preserve us in the faith which confesses, when asked, "Who do you say that I AM?", "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*