



# Bringing Home the Word



SAINTS PETER AND PAUL June 29, 2008

## The Fisherman and the Scholar

By Diane M. Houdek

Today's feast highlights, through the lives of these two great saints, the wonderful complexity of our Christian community. Peter is an impulsive Galilean fisherman and Paul is a complex thinker, a Roman citizen, a scholar. And there's room for both in our community. Through the centuries there have been times when one or the other strain may have dominated the thinking and teachings of the church. The lives of the saints show us both great scholars and fools for Christ. Ours is not a faith of the educated elite, but neither is it without any intellectual content. Perhaps it's no accident that catechisms are often written as questions and answers.

### SUNDAY READINGS

#### **Acts 12:1-11**

A king takes every step to silence the gospel. But he is no match for the power of prayer and the power of God.

#### **2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18**

We hear of Paul's experience in prison. He has remained faithful to his missionary call and will soon be with Christ forever.

#### **Matthew 16:13-19**

Jesus declares that Peter is the unique rock upon which the church is to be built.

The central question of Christianity is perhaps the one Jesus asks: "Who do you say that I am?" We will respond in different ways at different times in our life, but the person of Jesus Christ is always at the center.

Peter, inspired by God, could proclaim Jesus as Lord and Messiah, even though it would take him a lifetime of learning what that meant. During the passion, when others asked him who Jesus was, his fear and confusion caused him to forget all that he believed and knew and he denied his own identity as a follower of Jesus. In the end, Jesus' final question for Peter was the one that really matters: "Do you love me?"

Paul experienced a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, asking the figure before him "Who are you?" only to hear the answer, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." He in turn would spend the rest of his life making sense of that answer and formulating for the first time many of the theological questions that have shaped the content of our faith.

Theology was defined by St. Anselm as "faith seeking understanding" and it's been a strong part of our tradition. But a consideration of some of the holiest people in our lives and in our community will also tell us that it's possible to have great faith with almost no understanding of the intricacies of theology. And unfortunately the theology depart-

ments of some of the world's greatest universities will also reveal that it's possible to understand the deepest intellectual questions but have no real faith in the God at the heart of those pursuits.

A friend who has spent many years working in religious education has pointed out that many of the people she's educated over the years have had Ph.D.'s in their chosen fields but only an eighth grade understanding of religion, and have dismissed the church as simplistic and ignorant. She knows that she needs to appeal to their intellects before God can bring their hearts to a deeper faith. On the other hand, religious educators often remind writers and speakers that weaving a web of complex, churchy words will lose those who need their information in simple, easy to understand packages, the infamous fifth-grade reading level for which daily newspapers strive.

Catholicism accepts people from all walks of life, in James Joyce's unforgettable description: "Here comes everybody." This is both the challenge and the grace of our church. Today's feast reminds us to strive for balance and inclusion, being open to everyone and available to everyone. Because when it comes right down to it, it's not about us at all. It's only about who Jesus is in our lives and in the lives of those we meet. Peter and Paul, each in his own way, knew this absolutely. †

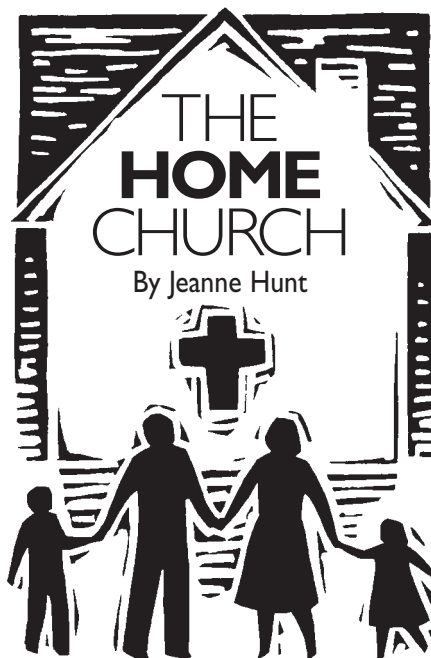
REFLECTION  
QUESTIONS  
QUESTIONS  
REFLECTION

- When and how did you come to recognize Jesus as your Messiah?
- Do you wear a cross? Why?
- What would help you take the next step in your spiritual life?
- How can we teach our children to surrender to conversion?

PRAYER

Take, O Lord,  
and receive  
my entire liberty,  
my memory,  
my understanding  
and my whole will.  
All that I am and  
all that I possess  
You have given me:  
I surrender it all to You  
to be disposed of  
according to Your will.  
Give me only Your love  
and Your grace;  
with these I will  
be rich enough,  
and will desire  
nothing more.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola



If you asked people, “Who is Jesus Christ?” some would give the *Catechism* answer, some would quote Scripture and a few might talk about a personal Messiah. The point of today’s Gospel is to lead us to that personal response. When we surrender to the person of Jesus Christ and encounter him as a real messiah, life changes radically. The encounter is called conversion. Saints Peter and Paul could tell us a thing or two about such an encounter. A “new creation” is the term Paul uses. Both of these men came to a crisis point in which they jumped headlong into the heart of Jesus Christ never to return. To make that leap requires courage and grace. Most of us want to make the Messiah stay within our safe boundaries: “You save my soul and I’ll visit you for one hour on Sunday.” Jesus wants nothing to do with that kind of messiahship. There are no deals in the kingdom. It is all or nothing. Jesus wants to bring our lives into complete wholeness and peace. There is nothing on earth quite as fine as a resting in communion with the Lord. In fact, it just might be the whole reason we were created. Let us take a moment to ask ourselves and our children, “Who is Jesus Christ?”

EXPLORING  
CATHOLIC  
IDENTITY

On June 28, 2007, the eve of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict XVI announced his intention to honor St. Paul by declaring the year between June 29, 2008, and June 29, 2009, as “The Year of Paul,” celebrating the 2000th anniversary of the saint’s birth.

The Holy Father said that the church today needs the energy and spirit of sacrifice that St. Paul devoted to spreading the Gospel of Christ and establishing the early Christian churches.

The Pauline Year will be marked by special liturgies, pilgrimages and a variety of cultural and ecumenical events. Pope Benedict asks that dioceses, parishes and other places of prayer observe this jubilee year.

“The Apostle of the Gentiles,” the pope said, “spent himself for the unity and harmony of all Christians. May he guide us and protect us in this bimillenary celebration, helping us to advance in the humble and sincere search for full unity of all the members of the mystical body of Christ.”

We will explore the life and teachings of St. Paul here over the next 52 Sundays.

—Rev. Norman W. Langenbrunner

CONNECTION

Hang a large crucifix in the center of your home and say St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Prayer of Surrender (see “Prayer”) together as a family.

WEEKDAY  
READINGS

Monday	Am 2:6-10, 13-16; Mt 8:18-22	Thursday	Eph 2:19-22; Jn 20:24-29 <i>Thomas</i>
Tuesday	Am 3:1-8; 4:11-12; Mt 8:23-27	Friday	Am 8:4-6, 9-12; Mt 9:9-13
Wednesday	Am 5:14-15, 21-24; Mt 8:28-34	Saturday	Am 9:11-15; Mt 9:14-17