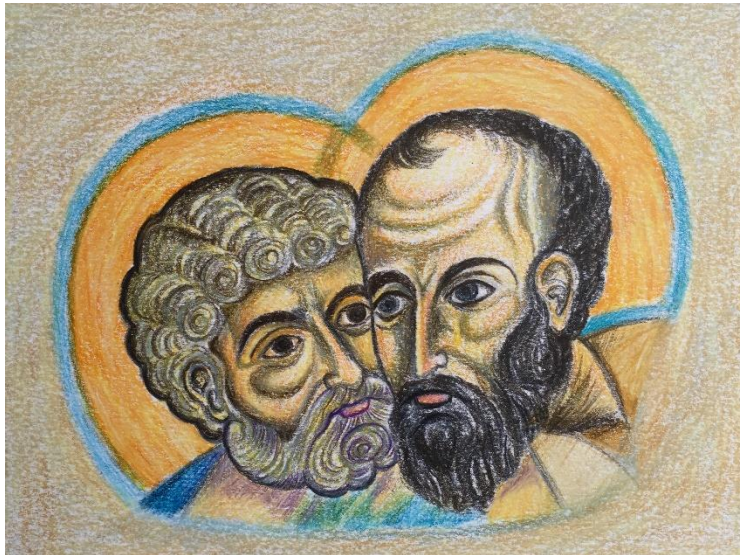


Feast of St Peter and St Paul



Drawing by Moya Hogarth of a 12th century icon.
Tradition states that they embraced before being executed.

“Tell me about yourself”, it’s the sort of request that can leave your blood running cold. Most often it is one of those open-ended questions we get nearing the end of an interview for a new job. We have carefully avoided all the usual pitfalls and then, just when we thought we had got away with it one of the panel comes up with that seemingly innocuous request, ‘Tell us about yourself’. It is the sort of request that comes up when sitting with a friend putting the world to rights over a bottle of claret or when faced with a new job or new beginning and your new colleagues need to suss you out.

It is the question that Jesus asks his disciples today in the Gospel, not tell me about yourself but tell me about myself, ‘Who do people say I am’. It is then that Peter makes that great statement of faith “you are the Christ the Son of the living God.”

Jesus having been recognised by Peter now in turn acknowledges him. “You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.” Peter will be the holder of the keys of the Kingdom and the custodian of the power to bind and to loose. Jesus doesn’t need to ask Peter to tell him about himself, he knows Peter so well. The change of name from Simon son of Jonah to Peter the rock signifies the relationship between Peter and Jesus, a relationship that will see them face the three times denial of Jesus by Peter on Maundy Thursday night and the three questions of Jesus to Peter “Do you love me” and Peter’s assurance, “You know I love you. Then Jesus

commissions Peter to feed his lambs and feed his sheep. He is now the forgiven one entrusted with the care of his brothers in the apostolate and through them with the communities of faith that they will minister to.

Paul often speaks about himself and his life in his letters, especially when challenged about his authenticity as an apostle. He had never met Jesus outside of the encounter on the road to Damascus, but his life as the apostle of the gentiles had been one of suffering and of danger, Yet as we see in the second reading one of fulfilment and of hope. Writing just before his death in Rome he writes to Timothy “I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me.” Here is someone confident in his faith and ready to accept even death for the sake of the Gospel entrusted to him.

So today we are faced with the reality of two men, they shared their faith in Jesus Christ. They were both fearless proponents of the Gospel, both preachers and teachers, both in the end giving their lives for their faith in Jesus Christ. Dying within a short time of each other in the city of Rome. As the preface of our Mass today puts it: “The blessed Apostles bring us joy, Peter foremost in confessing the faith, Paul its outstanding preacher, Peter who established the early church from the remnant of Israel, Paul, master and teacher of the gentiles that you call.”

Through the words of the Mass today Peter and Paul have fulfilled the request, “Tell me about yourself”, They have addressed that very request to each one of us. Through them God himself addresses each of us to tell him about ourselves. Would we call ourselves Christian? Are we honest in our relationships? Are we loving even at a cost, faithful and faith filled? Are we generous merciful and kind? Or would we in honesty not be so generous to ourselves? So how would we answer that request? Has our period of lockdown given us the time and the encouragement to address this question with honesty and see God pointing a direction for each of us to proclaim our faith in Him.

Canon John