

Ss Peter and Paul, June 29, 2015

Many wonderful stories, too many to consider on this special day. Most are contrasting stories. I will flash a few up on the screen, and hope that you want to take one away for future contemplation

Paul has an over-the-top conversion. An enemy to the young believers, he “breathes murderous threats.” Then he is struck blind and stunned to silence on the Damascus Road. The horse isn’t actually mentioned in the text but he came down with a hard bump.

Peter’s conversion is under-stated. Oh yes there’s a miraculous element in that catch of fish. But the gentle moment is in the words, “Lord, leave me; I am too sinful.” It is precious when we feel that. And precious when God doesn’t obey, doesn’t let us push him away.

Peter says to the lame man, “I have no money to give but what I have I do give you; in the name of Jesus rise up and walk.” This happens at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. Or does the gate *become* beautiful because this healing happens there?

Paul isn’t so associated with miracles. But there is a peculiar one when a young man gets sleepy or bored during Paul’s preaching. Maybe you can identify with him right now! Paul is going on too long. It is not funny that the young man falls to his death from an upstairs window. Paul brings him back from the land of the dead. This represents what should happen to each of us: being wakened, becoming fully alive.

A similar story for Peter has to do with his release from prison by the angel in the dead of night. The angel uses the keys that are spiritually associated with Peter. At the place where the apostles are staying, young Rhoda, who answers his knock, screams “It is a ghost,” and slams the door in his face.

So many stories over which to reminisce. Including the final ones. Paul is beheaded near the Roman forum. The brilliance of his mind makes appropriate the ruthless cruelty of severing this mind from his body. Whatever I might think about Paul’s headstrong qualities—and he was difficult—I am sure he didn’t flinch.

By contrast, tradition tells us that Peter regressed once more to the spineless he exhibited by his denials after Jesus’ arrest. He runs away in a panic when his time comes near. He meets Jesus coming toward him carrying his cross. Peter says, “Quo vadis, Domine?” though I am sure he wasn’t speaking in Latin. “Where are you going, Lord?” “Into Rome to be crucified a second time,” Jesus answers. Peter is so ashamed he gathers up courage. He seizes the cross, marches

back, begs to be crucified upside down. He feels unworthy to die upright in the manner that Jesus did.

The two never appear together. Unless you consider Paul's writings which criticize Peter. Peter had to be pushed to admit Gentiles to full membership in the company of believers. His fortress mentality is suggested by his keys.

Yet we sing at morning office the beautiful antiphon, "Glorious are the apostles of Christ; they loved each other in this life; they were not divided in death." It's ironic: they loved each other at a distance and with some qualifications. But from the perspective of history, they are depicted in icons as holding one another in close embrace. This teaches us the underlying unity among Christians, and maybe even the underlying unity of humans, who are all God's children. Perhaps from heaven Peter and Paul want to tell us to do things differently: to work toward and experience unity in this life, not wait until death to enjoy it.

Gabriel Myers, OSB