

FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

Today we are honouring these two leaders Peter and Paul important persons in our spiritual tradition. From the title the implication is that they are of equal importance. But from the readings that are presented Peter is given more attention.

What each of these have to offer for our spiritual growth and development needs to be kept in balance.

Peter is the one who gives stability – as Jesus says in Luke about Peter, “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and you when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (Lk. 22:32)

Paul is the one who is in touch with where the divine wants to insert the Divine’s presence and message. Paul challenges us as a community not to be enclosed in on ourselves, but to offer the message of healing and hope to those that are outside our present community structure.

We need to keep in mind the radical decision Paul made by stating that to be a follower of Jesus, the Christ, a male person did not need to be circumcised. For many of those of the normal Jewish tradition thought this was not right. For them circumcision was a sign of their covenant with the Divine. To be a righteous male Jew to be in covenant with the Divine you needed to be circumcised. But, Paul was advocating that because of Jesus’ presence and message and because of the message to whom Paul was delivering the message circumcision did not need to be a requirement. Faith in Jesus Christ and living the requirements of his message was what established the new covenant.

Today, are we being asked, like Paul as Paul felt he was being asked, to broaden our view of who is to be welcomed into the family of God?

And as in Paul’s day this issue is not easily resolved, but it seems to me we need to be paying attention to the Pauline figures in our midst who are asking us to broaden our view of what it means to be human and what that means for some of our institutions.

Paul does establish local churches and sets up stable communities more in line with the spirit of Peter, but then he moves on to present the Christian message to others. These institutions are to be at the service of the message not to be ends in themselves as he often indicates in his letters.

The tension between a stable community and delivering a prophetic message still exists today. There are those of us who want to have a stabilized or central structure, to the extent of even going back to what is perceived as a more stable time, which it seems to me is perceived to be more in line with the role of Peter and certainly the Gospel reading accentuates this view, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church."

Whereas in 2Timothy we have, a letter in all likelihood created by Paul himself, stating, "The Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all Gentiles hear it."

And in our own time we have been seeing these two approaches being played out: John Paul II and Benedict presented a more Petrine approach for the Church whereas the late Pope Francis took a more Pauline approach urging us to move out to the poor to the marginalized and those considered the "Gentiles" of our day.

So, how are we in our own time holding in tension the role of Paul and the role of Peter so that no one gets excluded from the hopeful and healing message of Jesus?