



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

## **The Solemnity of St Peter & St Paul**

***Holy Peter and Paul, pray for us***

*Readings: Acts 12: 1-11, Ps 34, 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17, 18, Matthew 16: 13-19*

When the pilgrim to the Eternal City visits the great basilica on Vatican Hill, he will be led down to a small glassed in space at the end of the tombs of the popes underneath the high altar. It is the nearest that most visitors will get to the tomb of St. Peter.

During the Second World War Pope Pius XII began excavations which, over a decade, would reveal the extensive Roman cemetery beneath. At the critical juncture, directly beneath the layers of centuries under the high altar, was a set of graves angled towards one central spot. Inscriptions invoked the prayers of the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter. At the focal point of these graves was a small burial space that contained bones wrapped in purple cloth. Today we know those bones to be almost two millennia old and belonging to a man in his late sixties.

We know then, from earliest Christian times, the importance of relics and the unquestioned practice of the invocation of the saints. If you are in Rome you should advance book a tour of the 'SCAVI' online and go see and pray for yourself.

A mile or two away, in the bizarre Mussolini designed suburb of EUR, is the ancient abbey of *Tre Fontane* (three fountains). There you can kneel and pray in the cell where the great theologian missionary, St. Paul, was held prior to his execution just a few yards away.

His remains are venerated at the church which bears his name 'outside the walls'.

Today we celebrate and give thanks for these two great apostolic pillars of the Faith. As men they could not have been more different. Peter the impetuous, excitable working man from the quayside on the Galilee, entrusted with the authority of the Church. Paul, the rigorous ascetic intellectual committed to truth and with a single-mindedness that made light of persecution and suffering.

What binds them together, this earliest follower of Christ and his one-time vicious opponent is revelation – and a love of Jesus.

Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Christ at Caesarea Philippi was not of mortal origin, Jesus tells him. Similarly we know that St. Paul's revelation came out of a clear blue sky on the Damascus Road. The result of those revelations was that these two men would follow Jesus to the end – Peter on the inverted cross on Vatican Hill, Paul by the axe blade – a privilege of his Roman citizenship – on the rough patch of ground on the outskirts of town.

As followers of Jesus, we need them both. We admire them both. We invoke their prayers and we try, in our own inadequate way, to follow their examples.

Without St. Peter there would be no papacy, no magisterium, no coherent and unbroken tradition of the Faith handed down, generation by generation. There would be no unified Church where the Word is proclaimed consistently and where the sacraments, the promised interventions of God, are valid.

Without St. Paul we would fall short in our understanding of the cosmic implications of the coming of the Son of God. We would struggle to understand the salvific power of the Cross of Jesus. Without St. Paul the nascent Jewish cult of 'The Way' might never have been transformed into the Universal Church. His tireless mission and ministry opened the doors of salvation to a pagan world.

So, in the Roman Canon, the great prayer of the Mass, these two men head the list after Mary and Joseph. It is the prayers of these two giants that we regularly invoke and it is their faithfulness and love of Jesus to which all of us as disciples must aspire.

We need them both – the Petrine Rock of the Papacy unshakeable in the transmission of the Faith in a transient world AND the passionate missionary zeal of Paul, the Teacher of the World, for the salvation of souls. In both men the love of Jesus shone. If the love of Jesus so shines in us people will understand the urgency of our task. We have only one lifetime in which to do our bit. Let us honour their feast day by recommitting ourselves to knowing and sharing the Gospel of the Lord.

Holy Peter and Paul.....pray for us.