

Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter & Paul, 29.vi.2008
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle, Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, 08:30 (Spoken Order), 10:00 (ELW Setting 5)
Acts 12:1-11; Psalm 87:1-3,5-7; II Timothy 4:6-8,17-18; John 21:15-19

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come! ☩ Amen.

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?”
--John 21:15

“Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?”
--Acts 9:4

Of all the Apostles, Saint Peter and Saint Paul are the two
without whose life and witness the Christian Church and
the spread of the Christian faith throughout the world
would be unthinkable. And yet, where do they begin in
their relationship with the Risen Christ, Christ in His
glorified Body Who calls neither Peter nor Paul by the
names the Church uses for them?

Peter ‘the Rock’ of faith has tried to turn the clock back. He has tried to go back to being Shimôn bar Jonah, Simon son of John, the Galilean fisherman. Saul of Tarsus is utterly convinced he is doing God’s will by persecuting the Nazarene blasphemy, but it is Christ Himself, Messiah Himself, the Anointed One of the Most High Himself Saul is persecuting in his fanatical persecution of the followers of Christ.

But the God Who loved us enough to make us and the whole world out of nothing, the God Who responded to every disobedience and every rejection of His love with a greater determination to make us see that love will not leave these two alone. He finds the Big Fisherman where Simon thought God might at last leave him alone, there on the seashore with things Simon can understand, with boats and nets and the changing moods of the sea and with the

fish that were his living. There, *exactly* there, Our Lord finds Simon who had denied Him in *His* suffering, three times, asking him three times, “Do you love me, Simon?” And the Crucified and Risen One finds Saul and claims Him as His own *in the very act of Saul’s blind hatred toward the Church.*

What kind of a beginning is that? That is *our* beginning before the Risen Christ, before the Christ Who feels our apathy and our practical denial of Him in our daily lives as much as He felt the lashes of a Roman whip on the night of His Passion. That is *our* beginning as we treat the Church as everything but the immaculate Bride of Christ, as our plaything to do with as we like, as a private club from which we can exclude those not to our liking, as a way of making a living, as a religious veil over our self-absorbed and selfish lives, instead of honoring and

cherishing her as our *Mother and Teacher* in the faith. In these and countless other ways, both great and small, we persecute the Church, but may the glorified and victorious Christ catch up with us, with each of us, in just as startling a way as He did with Saul on the road to Damascus.

Only then, only when we are cornered in our own attempt to evade His judgment and His grace will any of us be fit to be sent to others as bringers of faith, hope and love. It is said that, in the United States Marine Corps and in other branches of the armed forces of our own and of other nations, a new recruit must be taken apart and put back together again, physically, emotionally and mentally, in order to be transformed into a soldier among soldiers, a member of a fighting unit that then has a chance of obtaining its objective in achieving victory over the enemy.

The Holy Apostles Peter and Paul experienced something

like this, but for a very different purpose. They were in effect reduced to nothing so that the Holy Spirit could transform them into new men of faith, not looking backward toward Tarsus or Galilee but forward and outward toward the whole world.

Our life together as Congregation and Pastor has not been without its trials and even its sufferings. The separate ways ahead of us will be no different. But let us understand what the LORD is doing with us and why. We are neither the Christians we may always think we are, nor are we the Christians we may pretend to be, but we are instead the forgiven sinners we are, and it is with Christians such as we that Christ intends to establish, build and extend His Church. Also to us He says, “Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep” and “Follow me.” ❖ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins
by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His
God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion both now
and forever! ✠ Amen.



S. D. G.!