

Feast of Peter and Paul

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The first thing I want to say this morning is that I think that some people would prefer that this feast of Peter and Paul be renamed the feast of Peter, Paul and Mary. Given the significant Role that Mary of Magdala played in the life of the early church as the first evangelist, the first to announce the good news of Jesus Christ, she should have her place with Peter and Paul. If Mary were in the picture we would have an image that might better reflect the mystery of God as Trinity. But alas that's not what we have to work with.

Speaking of being in the picture or out of it, two days ago I was in the National Museum of Catalunya in Barcelona and knowing that this feast of St Peter and st Paul was being celebrated this Sunday, what to my wondering eyes should appear but the El Greco portrait of Peter and Paul. Some of you may have had the opportunity to see the El Greco exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts or be familiar with his style of portraiture where faces and hands are elongated. I had never seen this painting before and was struck with one detail. One hand of Peter and one of Paul is intertwined reminding the viewer of how the lives of these two apostles have become intertwined, woven together because of their encounter with Jesus Christ. In a sense you

couldn't find two more opposite people. Peter, the simple fisherman, unschooled, illiterate, with, I would imagine, a very basic understanding of the Jewish Law and Paul, the Pharisee, highly educated, knowing all the nuances of the Law. Two very unlikely candidates to be joined together with their hands intertwined, except for their passionate belief in Jesus Christ as the Chosen One, the Messiah, the revelation of God's desire for the world. But that is what Jesus does through the spirit, brings together the most unlikely people and intertwines their lives, their hands and their hearts.

The second thing that I wanted to say this morning I was told not to say by Jesuit brothers. But in fact I have already said it. I referred to my recent trip to Barcelona and Montserrat with other Jesuits from around the world. He told me don't ever tell the people of God where you've traveled to. They'll think that yours is a privileged life where you get to travel a lot and they have to stay home and work for a living. (This I should mention from an Australian Jesuit who spends half of his life going around the world) But since we celebrate Paul whose life in Christ was a travelogue of places around the Mediterranean, I don't feel bad about mentioning that I had the wonderful privilege of being with other Jesuits in Montserrat, Spain on the mountain where St Ignatius

spent a night in vigil before the statue of Our Lady of Montserrat before he hung it all up, so to speak. There is the chapel of our lady on the Holy Mountain of Montserrat, Ignatius hung up his sword, his knife and stripped himself of the vesture of a soldier, to dress himself once and for all in the garb of a simple pilgrim, utterly open to the grace of God and the love of Christ. In that moment of "divesting" he did not know how God would use him as God used Peter and Paul and Mary and the other first followers of Jesus but he was completely available for the work of God's kingdom. (I can not tell you how powerful that experience was of gathering with Jesuits from around the world in the late hours of the night and hearing the reading from the autobiography of Ignatius where he describes his desire to leave all behind so that he may be totally free to do God's will).

The final thing that I wanted to say this morning is that this feast of Peter and Paul reminds us that we are part of a larger ecclesial community. We remember these critical leaders of the early church so that we can see who we are as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. This is what I experienced again joined with Catholics from Africa, Asia, Australia, North and South America, and Europe/ no one from Antarctica. I was reminded again that we belong to a Church of many races, cultures and languages. We belong to a church that tries to

answers the Gospel question "who do you say that I am?" in the lives of faithful people who put into practice the faith in Jesus Christ we share.

And yes, I do lead a privileged life. Especially because of the opportunity to serve within this extraordinary community.