

*Readings*

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

1 Cor 12:3-7, 12-13

Jn 20:19-23

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Saints Peter and Paul are part of the strong foundation of the Church founded by Christ. They are interesting both in their diversity and in what they had in common. Peter apparently was a simple man, uneducated, emotional, tending to “jump to conclusions.” Paul was a scholar, also a man of passion but one who (before his conversion) was more passionate about his Jewish heritage than the Christ worshiped by the “hated” Christians. Both Peter and Paul were (like us) “cracked” in their own special way.

Peter’s weakness was that in the beginning he loved Christ in the wrong way. He could not stand the thought that “his” Jesus would not always be triumphant in this life. Thus, when he first heard Christ’s prophecy of his passion, Peter cried out “No way, Lord! I will not let this happen!” It was this misdirected passion that later led him to cut off the ear of the poor servant in the Garden of Gethsemane when the authorities came to take Jesus away. This supposed dedication to Christ did not stop him from then running away in the darkness. Of course he would later sneak back to see what was going on but then his fear caused him to deny that he even knew Christ when questioned by the young maid-servant in the court-yard of the Temple.

Paul’s “crackedness” manifested itself in a different way. His weakness was a pride that prevented him from seeing anything “divine” in the executed carpenter-preacher from Nazareth.

It took a direct intervention by the now-risen Jesus, knocking him off his “high” horse on the road to Damascus, before Paul came to believe. Perhaps that same pride was in the background tempting him in the midst of his later preaching to think more of himself than he should have. He admitted that it took some sort of malady, a “sting of the flesh” to remind him that he was only a man and that any success he had was because of the grace of the God.

The secret of the success of both apostles was in their capacity to love. Peter was chosen to be head of the Church not because of his degrees but because he “loved much.” Paul became a powerful advocate for Christ not because of his scholarship but because through his love for Christ his listeners were able to believe that they too were included in Christ’s love.

Christianity speaks about union with God ... losing oneself in God ... still maintaining individuality and consciousness but perhaps becoming “two in one spirit” with God like a married couple becoming “two in one flesh” through their love. Both Peter and Paul died for Christ and in that final act of love they accomplished the goal of any great love affair: “To become one with the loved one.” Reflecting on the great love that drove Peter, Paul, and all martyrs to die for Christ, Augustine would later cry out:

Oh, to love like that, to go and be lost to self. To become God! (Sermon 159, # 8)