

Homily Ss Peter and Paul 2024

As The General Election looms, I know all of you are becoming politically informed and up to date with the different manifestos and policies of the various Parties, There is one politician, you probably don't know him. He is a humble, unassuming character, honest to a fault and full of concern for migrants and the marginalised in general. He is uncontroversial and has costed all his policies as realistically implementable. As I said you probably won't know him, he is Nigel Farage. In reality as John the Baptist, whose feast we celebrated last Monday, said of Jesus when asked if he John was The Messiah. 'I must decrease, and He must increase.' Perhaps Mr Farage could also say, 'That kind of humble, unassuming man must increase in me, and my present controversial public persona must decrease.'

St Peter found himself in prison for preaching the Risen Christ. Peter was determined to preach the Good News to the poor, prisoners, the blind, the paralysed and those most vulnerable in Jewish society, So much so, that his honest proclamation of The Gospel led to him being imprisoned by King Herod. The night before his trial he was miraculously freed from prison by an angel who led him past various guards to freedom. Later, Peter would be crucified upside down in Rome for his loyalty to the Risen Saviour. This is ironic in that during Christ's passion Peter had denied Christ, However, it is clear that 'the old man in Peter decreased after Easter and Pentecost and the new brave, courageous and selfless man increased.'

St Paul was initially a Persecutor of Christ and was responsible for the death of many in the Early Christian Community, Paul steeped in The Law, and the legalism which often accompanied its strict observance, believed he was doing the right thing trying to stamp out this new Way of proclaiming God's salvation in Christ Jesus. On his way to Damascus Paul encountered The Risen Christ and filled with The Holy Spirit became the 'Apostle to The Gentiles' spreading God's Word throughout The Roman Empire, suffering imprisonment, shipwreck, floggings and beatings for the sake of The Gospel. 'The old man in Paul decreased after his experience on the Damascus Road and the new fearless, determined and uncompromising apostle of Jesus increased.'

Jesus not only asks the disciples and Peter today on the road to Caesarea Philippi, 'Who do you say I am?' but he actually asks each one of us personally, 'Who is it that you are following, the Christ as he is or the Christ others have created in their own image and likeness?' Are we following the poor, totally dependent on The Father Christ whose mission is to bring Good News to the poor, the sick, the homeless, the marginalised or are we slaves of the trappings of power, status, legalism, money and lavish spending. If it's the latter worldly Jesus, created by men we still have time, like Ss Peter and Paul, to become true disciples of The Risen Lord. Jesus gives us a timely warning, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. They pile burdens on people's shoulders and will not lift a finger to remove them...My yoke is easy and my burden light. Come to me all you who are heavy laden and overburdened and I will give you rest.' A message for all of us, 'We must decrease and he must increase.'