

## Homily Ss Peter and Paul 2026

With the resignation of Sir Keir Starmer, Andy Burnham has emerged as the frontrunner for the leadership of The Labour Party. I can't help but suspect that Burnham is a political opportunist and quietly ruthless. John the Baptist, whose feast we celebrated last week, said of Jesus when asked if he, John, was The Messiah? 'I must decrease, and He must increase.' Perhaps Andy Burnham could also say, 'That kind of humble, hard-working man that I can be must increase in me, the political opportunist 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 authentic disciples of The Risen Lord. Jesus gives us a timely warning, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. They pile burdens in 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.'