Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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"On this rock I will build my church" (Matt 16:16).

The Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Acts 12:1-11; 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18; Matt 16;13-19

Imagine founding an organization and choosing for your first CEO a person who was known for boasting and then folding up in a crisis. Imagine appointing him leader when he barely understood your purposes and was unprepared for the challenges the company would face after you left him in charge.

Imagine recruiting for your head marketing director a person who was known to oppose your goals and who despised your mission. Would you entrust the fate of the company to someone who had done everything possible to thwart its growth, even to the point of attacking and imprisoning its members?

Isn't this exactly what Jesus did by choosing Peter and Paul to be exemplars of the Gospel message and leaders of the emerging church within the Jewish community and then in the world? Each man had to undergo a heart-wrenching conversion to serve the fledgling church. How are we to make sense of this astonishing paradox?

The only answer is that the very mission of the church Jesus founded was to announce God's mercy to the world. Who would be better to preach that message than two leaders who had experienced it to the core of their being? Peter and Paul knew God's unconditional love because they had received it in full measure. They, more than the other disciples, were rescued from shame and failure by the love of Christ. They were chosen not for their worthiness and holiness, but for their unworthiness and failures.

Peter and Paul followed in the footsteps of Jesus, who was himself accounted a total failure, rejected and despised when he was condemned by his own religious community, abandoned by his own followers and executed as a dangerous criminal by the Roman state. By tradition, Peter and Paul both suffered rejection and ignominious deaths in Rome for preaching the Gospel of mercy. It was for this that they proved to be the perfect leaders and models for the faith.

God calls those who seem most unlikely to succeed, turning their failures into the experience that teaches them mercy for other failures and sinners. This should give us all hope, for aren’t we just the sort of people God is looking for to tell the world about divine mercy?

Note

Tomorrow’s column for Friday, June 30, 2023, will be the last *Pencil Preaching* post. For more news about Pat Marrin’s retirement, please see the previous three postings in the Spirituality section of the NCR website. Thank you.