

Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul June 29, 2008

Readings: Acts 12:1-11; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16:13-19

Humble Witness

It's good to be back with you this morning. Two weeks ago I spent Sunday morning attending Mass with my father at his church, along with my mother and brothers and sisters, to celebrate Father's Day. And last Sunday, Bill and I and my wife, Jenni, were at Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio with 13 of our teens from the youth group. It was, once again, quite an exhilarating experience to be with 2000 young people worshipping God and praising Him with full voices lifted in song and prayer. We were able to attend Mass all three days of the weekend. It was inspiring, also, to see 2000 young people on their knees on hard floors and kneeling on bleachers adoring the Lord present in the Eucharist and exposed in the monstrance during holy hours on both Friday and Saturday evenings. It was especially rewarding to see young people lined up waiting for more than an hour to go to Confession, to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The theme of the conference this year was "Witness" and it was based on Acts 1:8: ***"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth."*** The Holy Spirit definitely blessed our youth with graces and power. And the teens gave great witness; they showed they could be people of prayer, people of repentance, and at the same time be people of joy. The challenge for our teens will be leaving the support of 2000 of their peers and bringing this message and this powerful witness back home to their friends and families. They will need to continue their prayer life; they will need your prayers and support.

Today we celebrate the Solemnity of the Apostles Peter and Paul; two of the greatest witnesses to their faith, and the two men most responsible for establishing our Church. Pope Benedict stated last year on the vigil of this feast: ***"Thus, from the outset, Christian tradition has considered Peter and Paul to have been inseparable, even if each had a different mission to accomplish. Peter professed his faith in Christ first; Paul obtained as a gift the ability to deepen its riches. Peter founded the first community of Christians who came from the Chosen People; Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles. With different charisms they worked for one and the same cause: the building of Christ's Church."*** Peter and Paul were very different. They received their faith in different ways at different times. And they were called to evangelize different parts of the world's population. But they worked for the same cause.

It's important to remember that we are called to witness and evangelize in different ways, but that we are all called to witness and evangelize. But first we must be clear what we are witnessing to. In the gospel Jesus asked his disciples two questions. The first: ***"Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?"*** And the second: ***"But who do you say that I am?"*** Who do you say that Jesus is? Can you truly answer like Peter: ***"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** And if you can, you need to ask if your words and actions witness to others your belief in this statement; your belief in Jesus Christ? Are you willing to suffer like SS. Peter and Paul for your faith?

While we honor both St. Peter and St. Paul on this feast, this year we acknowledge St. Paul in a special way as the Church celebrates the 2000th anniversary of his birthday with a special year of jubilee in his honor. And that jubilee year begins today. During this next year there will be opportunities for special graces and indulgences for those that visit the Papal Basilica of St. Paul in Rome. And the Cardinal will be able to establish special times and places in the archdiocese for receiving indulgences as well. I believe our Evangelization Committee is planning a 6 week program on St. Paul. Stay tuned.

St. Paul is a wonderful example for us to follow because he was humble and knew that he could not achieve his mission through his own skills; he was dependent on God for all that he accomplished. Pope Benedict said of him: ***“From his Letters, we know that Paul was far from being a good speaker; on the contrary, he shared with Moses and Jeremiah a lack of oratory skill. ‘His bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account’ (II Cor 10: 10), his adversaries said of him. The extraordinary apostolic results that he was able to achieve cannot, therefore, be attributed to brilliant rhetoric or refined apologetic and missionary strategies. The success of his apostolate depended above all on his personal involvement in proclaiming the Gospel with total dedication to Christ; a dedication that feared neither risk, difficulty nor persecution.”*** The pope goes on to address the Church, each and every one of us, with these words: ***“Dear brothers and sisters, as in early times, today too Christ needs apostles ready to sacrifice themselves. He needs witnesses and martyrs like St Paul. Paul, a former violent persecutor of Christians, when he fell to the ground dazzled by the divine light on the road to Damascus, did not hesitate to change sides to the Crucified One and followed him without second thoughts. He lived and worked for Christ, for him he suffered and died. How timely his example is today!”***

It does not take a lot of formal theological education or speaking skills to witness to Christ; St. Paul taught us that by his example. What it takes is courage. Our young people returned from Steubenville with a call to be Christ’s witnesses to the ends of the earth. They will need courage; they will need to make sacrifices. Let us all join them in that calling and follow the example of St. Paul in a more active and conscious way during this next year, this year dedicated in his honor.

Your actions speak for you. Who do *they* say that the Son of Man is?

Deacon Joe Hulway