

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
FEAST OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL (6/28-29/2008)
Acts 12/1-11, Psalm 34, 2 Timothy 4/6-18, Matthew 16/13-19

The feast of these two great saints takes the place of the usual Sunday in Ordinary Time. It may be a good time for us to reflect a bit on the origins of the Church and how it looks today, twenty centuries after Peter and Paul initiated their marvelous work. Recently, I was sitting in my first floor office at the seminary when a young man strolled into the building looking rather lost. I asked if I could help him and he told me that he had just bought a book by Fr. Bob Barron (a member of our seminary faculty) and he was looking to see if he could speak to him. He enthusiastically confessed to having been deeply touched by the book.

We got talking, and he told me he was a Congregationalist from North Carolina. His Protestant denomination was having an annual meeting in our seminary Conference Center. Apparently this man had been present for three previous sessions on our grounds. At that, he stated how much he loved this seminary, and I replied that truly it was a beautiful place in the spring and other seasons as well. I also pointed out to him that our seminary chapel of the Immaculate Conception was modeled after a New England Congregational church which Cardinal Mundelein admired greatly.

“It isn’t just the grounds,” he informed me, “it is the spirit of the place.” For him, there was something sacred and rock-solid about the seminary; it represented a firm hold on truth in a world often so unsettled, and so unsure of itself. Rather ruefully, he admitted his main-line Protestant church would do well to get back to basic objective truths if it was to survive. Whether his point of view was shared by others in his Congregational sect, I do not know. But that conversation set me to thinking. We have wonderful tradition in the Catholic Church, tradition that we sometimes fail to really appreciate until a stranger points it out. At the same time, the Church has survived and thrived because it has always, even though ponderously and slowly on many occasions, managed to adapt to the cultures in which it exists – without compromising the tradition. If you study the history of the Catholic Church, you will see it has often traveled a bumpy and pothole filled road down through the centuries. There were times when the Church seemed anything but the true Church, Christ’s believing community here on earth. Admittedly, we have not always lived up to our commitment as disciples of the Lord. On the other hand, the Church has been a rock, a fortress of truth and stability for billions down through the centuries. Sts. Peter and Paul, with their courage and zeal, set a marvelous example for all of us. Both struggled with sin and commitment in their own lives; both were open to the Lord who “used” them as instruments of divine grace. Without their faith, and the faith of all those men and women who first followed after Jesus, we wouldn’t be here today. So, we thank Sts. Peter and Paul for showing us the way.