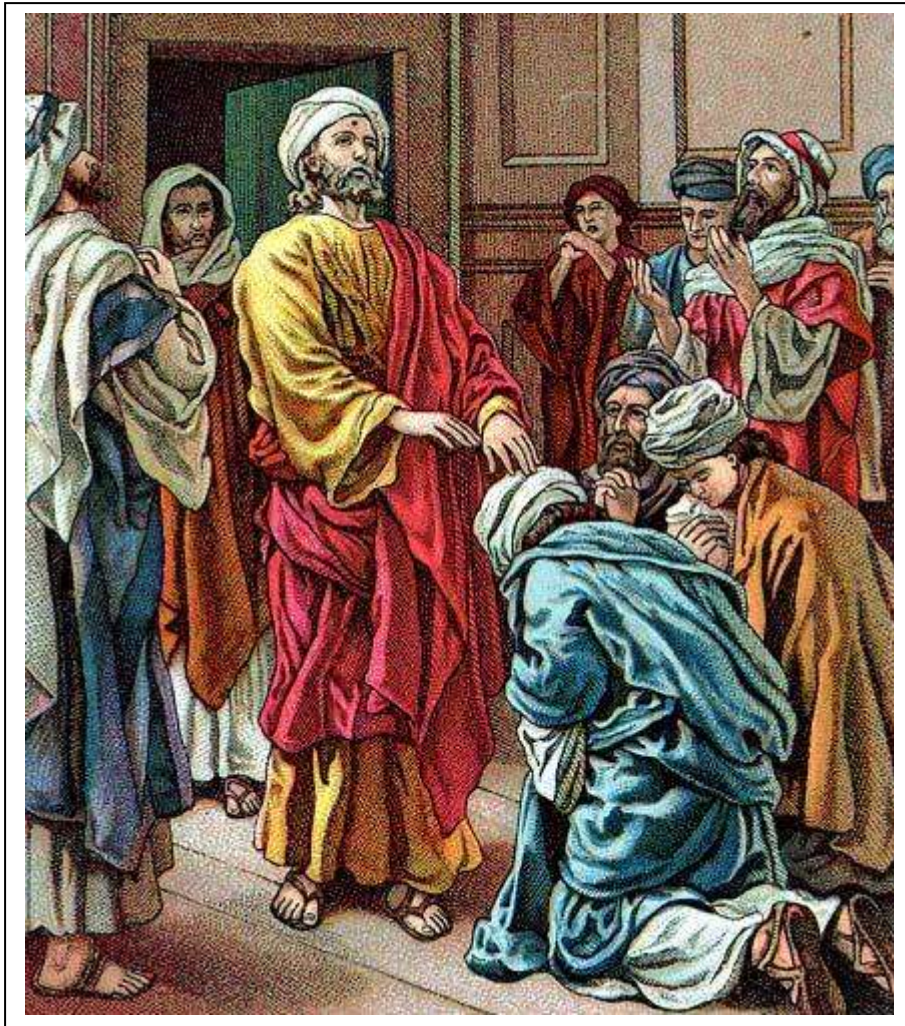


Seventh Week of Easter

Monday 25th May



First reading

Acts 19:1-8

The moment Paul laid hands on them the Holy Spirit came down on them

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul made his way overland as far as Ephesus, where he found a number of disciples. When he asked, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' they answered, 'No, we were never even told there was such a thing as a Holy Spirit.' 'Then how were you baptised?' he asked. 'With John's baptism' they replied. 'John's baptism' said Paul 'was a baptism of repentance; but he insisted that the people should believe in the one who was to come after him – in other words, Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, and the moment Paul had laid hands on them the Holy Spirit came down on them, and they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy. There were about twelve of these men.

He began by going to the synagogue, where he spoke out boldly and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. He did this for three months.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 67(68):2-7

Gospel Acclamation

Jn16:28

Alleluia, alleluia!
I came from the Father
and have come into the world,
and now I leave the world
to go to the Father.
Alleluia!

Gospel

John 16:29-33

Be brave, for I have conquered the world

His disciples said to Jesus, 'Now you are speaking plainly and not using metaphors! Now we see that you know everything, and do not have to wait for questions to be put into words; because of this we believe that you came from God.' Jesus answered them:

'Do you believe at last?

Listen; the time will come – in fact it has come already –
when you will be scattered,
each going his own way and leaving me alone.

And yet I am not alone,
because the Father is with me.

I have told you all this

so that you may find peace in me.

In the world you will have trouble,

but be brave: I have conquered the world.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

In this week between the Ascension of Jesus into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit, I thought it might be useful to take a fresh look at the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that we can pray for them. I shall try to relate each gift to the readings of the day and the feast days that occur during the week.

In the first reading today Paul encounters some followers of Jesus who have only been baptised with the baptism of John - a baptism of repentance. So far they have not received the Holy Spirit. Paul lays his hands on them and they receive the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues and prophesy.. Like the original disciples, they are now filled with courage. In the tradition list of gifts of the spirit, courage is called fortitude. It means that we can be brave, and not let fear hold us back.

In the gospel Jesus is encouraging the disciples at the last supper (and through them, us) to be brave. He has conquered the world, thus we have nothing to fear. Even when we experience turmoil on every side we can live our ultimate peace in Christ.

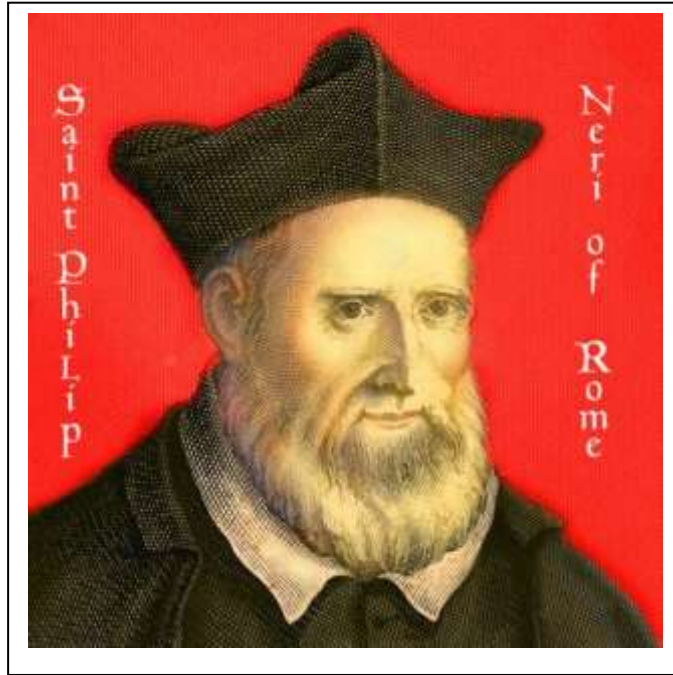
Fortitude, as well as making us brave, also gives us endurance, so that we can be faithful. It's being brave in a situation where we can keep on being brave. During this crisis, our workers on the frontline have been brave, and they keep on being brave while there is a steady flow of patients to care for. For the rest of us it might seem that lockdown is not a situation that calls for heroic bravery. However, steadfastly adhering to the restrictions keeps us and everyone else safe, and that, in and of itself, is heroic.

During this week we pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that we can become the best versions of ourselves. We become the person God wants us to be. Let us pray that the gifts of the Holy Spirit will make us as individuals strong, and thus strengthen our church.

Seventh Week of Easter

Tuesday 26th May

St Philip Neri



First reading

Acts 20:17-27

I have without faltering put before you the whole of God's purpose

From Miletus Paul sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus. When they arrived he addressed these words to them:

‘You know what my way of life has been ever since the first day I set foot among you in Asia, how I have served the Lord in all humility, with all the sorrows and trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. I have not hesitated to do anything that would be helpful to you; I have preached to you, and instructed you both in public and in your homes, urging both Jews and Greeks to turn to God and to believe in our Lord Jesus.

‘And now you see me a prisoner already in spirit; I am on my way to Jerusalem, but have no idea what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit, in town after town, has made it clear enough that imprisonment and persecution await me. But life to me is not a thing to waste words on, provided that when I finish my race I have carried out the mission the Lord Jesus gave me – and that was to bear witness to the Good News of God’s grace.

‘I now feel sure that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will ever see my face again. And so here and now I swear that my conscience is clear as far as all of you are concerned, for I have without faltering put before you the whole of God’s purpose.’

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 67(68):10-11,20-21

Gospel Acclamation

cf.Jn14:18

Alleluia, alleluia!

I will not leave you orphans, says the Lord;

I go, but I will come back to you,

and your hearts will be full of joy.

Alleluia!

Gospel

John 17:1-11

Father, it is time for you to glorify me

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:

‘Father, the hour has come:
glorify your Son
so that your Son may glorify you;
and, through the power over all mankind that you have given him,
let him give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him.
And eternal life is this:
to know you,
the only true God,
and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
I have glorified you on earth
and finished the work that you gave me to do.
Now, Father, it is time for you to glorify me
with that glory I had with you
before ever the world was.
I have made your name known
to the men you took from the world to give me.
They were yours and you gave them to me,
and they have kept your word.
Now at last they know
that all you have given me comes indeed from you;
for I have given them the teaching you gave to me,
and they have truly accepted this, that I came from you,
and have believed that it was you who sent me.
I pray for them;
I am not praying for the world
but for those you have given me,
because they belong to you:
all I have is yours
and all you have is mine,
and in them I am glorified.
I am not in the world any longer,
but they are in the world,
and I am coming to you.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

Paul takes his farewell of the communities he has built up in Asia Minor. He does not know what the future will hold in store for him as in chains he is led back to Jerusalem, but in his heart he knows he will never see these people again. Without realising it, he is destined for the glory that Jesus promises to the disciples at the Last Supper. The glory of being able to bear witness to Jesus as the saviour of the world. In fact, he will be able to bear witness to Jesus in Rome itself, the centre of the empire and hub of the world.

Today we celebrate the feast of St Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians. St Philip is sometimes called the second apostle of Rome, with Paul being the first, because of the impact his work had on the ordinary citizens of the city.

Both Paul and Philip were blessed with the gift of wisdom. More than simply enabling us to know the right answers, wisdom illuminates our minds to help us to see reality from God’s point of view. Paul, as he bears witness to Christ, is able to see that his mission is much bigger than himself and his own personal safety. Philip was determined that everyone should have spiritual experiences that convey to the grandeur of God. In the Oratories he founded, the faithful could find sound teaching, uplifting liturgy and buildings that attested to the greatness of God. Would that we become wise in the same way.

Seventh Week of Easter

Wednesday 27th May

St Augustine of Canterbury



First reading

Acts 20:28-38

I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, and its power

Paul addressed these words to the elders of the church of Ephesus:

‘Be on your guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers, to feed the Church of God which he bought with his own blood. I know quite well that when I have gone fierce wolves will invade you and will have no mercy on the flock. Even from your own ranks there will be men coming forward with a travesty of the truth on their lips to induce the disciples to follow them. So be on your guard, remembering how night and day for three years I never failed to keep you right, shedding tears over each one of you. And now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace that has power to build you up and to give you your inheritance among all the sanctified.

‘I have never asked anyone for money or clothes; you know for yourselves that the work I did earned enough to meet my needs and those of my companions. I did this to show you that this is how we must exert ourselves to support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, who himself said, “There is more happiness in giving than in receiving.”’

When he had finished speaking he knelt down with them all and prayed. By now they were all in tears; they put their arms round Paul’s neck and kissed him; what saddened them most was his saying they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 67(68):29-30,33-36

Gospel Acclamation

Mt28:19,20

Alleluia, alleluia!

Go, make disciples of all the nations.

I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.

Alleluia!

Gospel

John 17:11-19

Father, keep those you have given me true to your name

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:
'Holy Father,
keep those you have given me true to your name,
so that they may be one like us.
While I was with them,
I kept those you had given me true to your name.
I have watched over them
and not one is lost
except the one who chose to be lost,
and this was to fulfil the scriptures.
But now I am coming to you
and while still in the world I say these things
to share my joy with them to the full.
I passed your word on to them,
and the world hated them,
because they belong to the world
no more than I belong to the world.
I am not asking you to remove them from the world,
but to protect them from the evil one.
They do not belong to the world
any more than I belong to the world.
Consecrate them in the truth;
your word is truth.
As you sent me into the world,
I have sent them into the world,
and for their sake I consecrate myself
so that they too may be consecrated in truth.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

Paul, in taking his leave of his churches in Asia, prays for the leaders he is leaving behind. He asks them to follow his example, and give of their services gratuitously. Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and wherever he went, he could find work to do to support himself, so that he was never a burden on the communities he served. Similarly, in the gospel, Jesus is praying for his followers, the ones to whom he is about to entrust the mission. He prays to the Father that they be "consecrated" in the truth. At Mass bread and wine is consecrated so as to become a new sacramental reality. So too the disciples are changed by being consecrated by Jesus to be able to bear witness to him in a world that is hostile to holiness.

St Augustine of Canterbury was sent by Pope Gregory the Great to Britain (the land of angels) to establish the Catholic Church here in 597. Augustine was surprised to find that Christianity had already taken root here. St Albans had been a centre of Christian worship since the third Century when a brave Roman soldier took the place of a priest and was executed in his stead.

What Augustine did bring to the faith in this country was organisation. He began the great Cathedral at Canterbury on the route from the coast to London. Everywhere he appointed bishops and established diocese so that the needs of the faithful could be provided for. In just 10 years he changed the face of Christianity in this country for good. The goodness he found in pockets all over the country was transformed into an enduring presence, a holiness that could last.

The gift to pray for today is Fear of the Lord, also called Wonder or Awe. When we are consecrated to the truth, the wonder of our faith shines out in a way that all can see. Let us pray for a lively faith that will inspire others to be touched by the greatness of God.

Seventh Week of Easter

Thursday 28th May



First reading

Acts 22:30,23:6-11

'You have borne witness in Jerusalem: now you must do the same in Rome'

Since the tribune wanted to know what precise charge the Jews were bringing, he freed Paul and gave orders for a meeting of the chief priests and the entire Sanhedrin; then he brought Paul down and stood him in front of them. Now Paul was well aware that one section was made up of Sadducees and the other of Pharisees, so he called out in the Sanhedrin, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee and the son of Pharisees. It is for our hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.' As soon as he said this a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was split between the two parties. For the Sadducees say there is neither resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, while the Pharisees accept all three. The shouting grew louder, and some of the scribes from the Pharisees' party stood up and protested strongly, 'We find nothing wrong with this man. Suppose a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel?' Feeling was running high, and the tribune, afraid that they would tear Paul to pieces, ordered his troops to go down and haul him out and bring him into the fortress.

Next night, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'Courage! You have borne witness for me in Jerusalem, now you must do the same in Rome.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 15(16):1-2,5,7-11

Gospel Acclamation

cf. Jn 16:7,13

Alleluia, alleluia!

I will send you the Spirit of truth, says the Lord;
he will lead you to the complete truth.

Alleluia!

Gospel

John 17:20-26

Father, may they be completely one

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:

‘Holy Father,
I pray not only for these,
but for those also
who through their words will believe in me.
May they all be one.
Father, may they be one in us,
as you are in me and I am in you,
so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.
I have given them the glory you gave to me,
that they may be one as we are one.
With me in them and you in me,
may they be so completely one
that the world will realise that it was you who sent me
and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.
Father, I want those you have given me
to be with me where I am,
so that they may always see the glory you have given me
because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
Father, Righteous One,
the world has not known you,
but I have known you,
and these have known that you have sent me.
I have made your name known to them
and will continue to make it known,
so that the love with which you loved me may be in them,
and so that I may be in them.’

Fr Tim’s Reflection

Today let us pray for the gift of counsel, a gift of divine intuition which will point us in the right direction regardless of the situation we find ourselves in. This gift from the Holy Spirit enables us to see the world in the way that God sees it, so that we can make choices informed by his holy will.

Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jewish faith, to account for his persistence in teaching the resurrection of Jesus. It is this same body who had conspired to have Jesus put to death in the first place. It was the Sanhedrin who had first furnished Paul with letters authorising him to have Christians arrested. Now was his chance to witness before them and account for his actions.

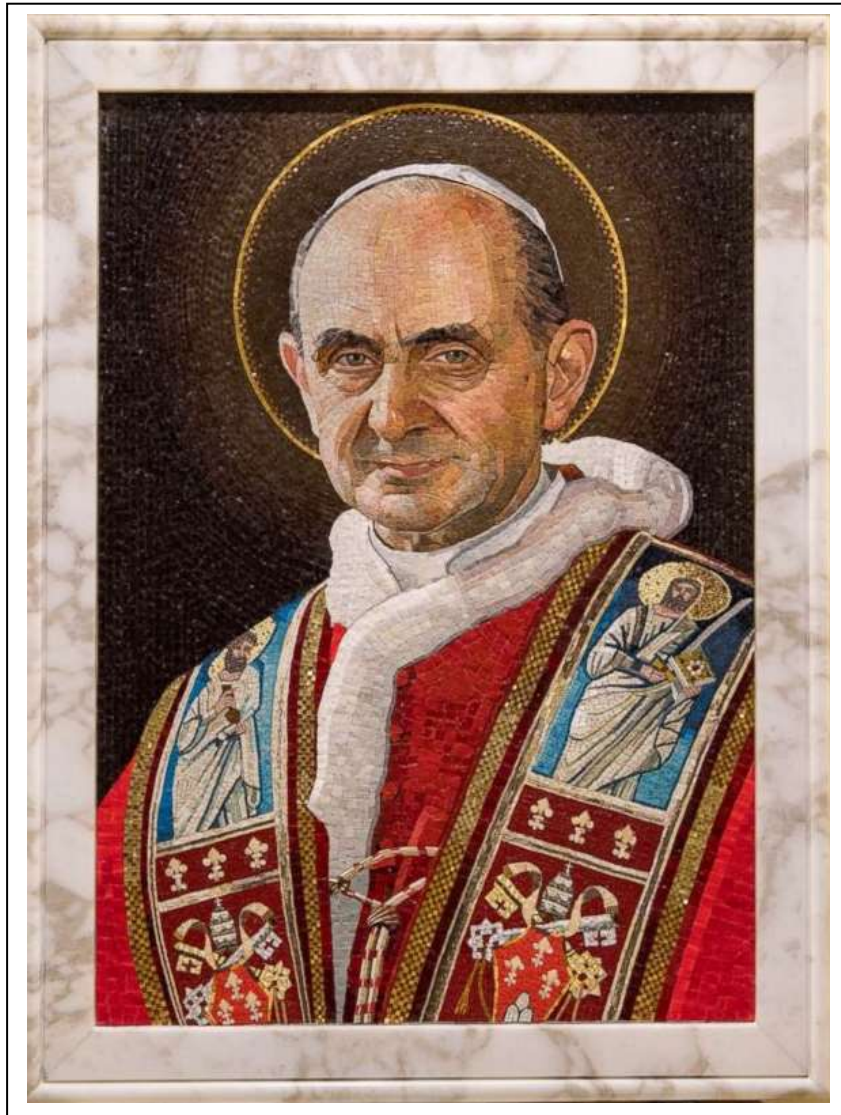
Paul himself was a Pharisee, the sect within Judaism which believed in an afterlife. Part of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees like Paul, while the rest were Sadducees, those who believe there is nothing to look forward to after death. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul exploits this fundamental difference. He sparks an argument, that reduces the proceeding to pandemonium. The Lord appears to Paul, granting him courage and promising him the opportunity to witness further in Rome.

At variance with what we see in the first reading, the gospel shows us Jesus praying for the gift of unity for his disciples. Jesus is coming to the end of his teachings at the Last Supper and prays that his followers will always be united. Superficially it seems that this prayer of Jesus has not come true. Today we see Christianity split into countless churches and denominations. Yet, this multiplicity of witnesses is united by the way in which we live the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each Christian grouping can make choices right for them as they receive the gift of counsel. Let us pray that that gift be ours as well.

Seventh Week of Easter

Friday 29th May

Saint Pope Paul VI



First reading

Acts 25:13-21

'I ordered Paul to be remanded until I could send him to Caesar'

King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus. Their visit lasted several days, and Festus put Paul's case before the king. 'There is a man here' he said 'whom Felix left behind in custody, and while I was in Jerusalem the chief priests and elders of the Jews laid information against him, demanding his condemnation. But I told them that Romans are not in the habit of surrendering any man, until the accused confronts his accusers and is given an opportunity to defend himself against the charge. So they came here with me, and I wasted no time but took my seat on the tribunal the very next day and had the man brought in. When confronted with him, his accusers did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected; but they had some argument or other with him about their own religion and about a dead man called Jesus whom Paul alleged to be alive. Not feeling qualified to deal with questions of this sort, I asked him if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there on this issue. But Paul put in an appeal for his case to be reserved for the judgement of the august emperor, so I ordered him to be remanded until I could send him to Caesar.'

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 102(103):1-2,11-12,19-20

Gospel Acclamation

Jn14:26

Alleluia, alleluia!

The Holy Spirit will teach you everything
and remind you of all I have said to you.

Alleluia!

Gospel

John 21:15-19

Feed my lambs, feed my sheep

Jesus showed himself to his disciples, and after they had eaten he said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He replied, 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep.' Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'

'I tell you most solemnly,

when you were young

you put on your own belt

and walked where you liked;

but when you grow old

you will stretch out your hands,

and somebody else will put a belt round you

and take you where you would rather not go.'

In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.'

Fr Tim's Reflection

Paul of Tarsus is sometimes referred to as being "all things to all men". He had this knack of being able to bring out a new facet of his being to every situation. Today in the first reading, being accused of crimes against the Jewish faith, he pulls out of the bag the fact that, as well as being a Jew, he is in fact a Roman Citizen, and thus has the right for his case to be heard by the emperor in Rome. It is the beginning of the end.

The gospel jumps to the end of St John, where Jesus appears to seven of his disciples as they go fishing one day. Jesus uses this occasion as the moment to build up Peter, the one who had denied him three times while he was before Pilate. Peter is asked if he really loves Jesus, and each time he says that he does, he is commissioned to feed his lambs and feed his sheep.

The gift to pray for today is the gift of piety. Piety in the English language has been reduced to external actions of religiosity. Someone who enjoys being seen saying prayers is labelled "pious". This is not the gift the Holy Spirit wants to bring today. I like to call piety "practical holiness". As Peter was commissioned to look after the first followers of Jesus by "feeding" them, so we are called to care for others in a practical way.

Peter, like Paul, will end up by being given the opportunity to testify to the Lord in Rome. Though the Acts of the Apostles ends before we get to this point, we believe that both were martyred in Rome in the year 66. Peter, feeling unworthy to share the same death as Jesus, was crucified upside down, while Paul, the Roman Citizen, exercised his right to be beheaded. However, both gave their lives in the service of the Lord.

Today the Church invites us to celebrate the feast of St Pope Paul VI. He was the pope who succeeded Pope John XXIII. Inspired by St Paul, he chose Paul as his name. His task was to oversee the completion of the second Vatican Council and see to its implementation. The major reform of the Council was the changing of the celebration of Mass from Latin into the vernacular. This enabled those attending Mass to be part of the celebration and to experience "practical holiness". We pray for the gift of piety for ourselves and our church.