

Epiphany Catholic Church
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June 19, 2024

Dear Parishioner and Friend:

Every year on June 29, our Catholic Church celebrates the Solemnity of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Apostles. This feast is one of the most beautiful and uplifting celebrations in our liturgical calendar. The Church commemorates the martyrdom of these two important followers of Jesus Christ. Although their faith in God and Jesus eventually cost them their own lives, the legacies of their preaching the good news about the resurrection of Jesus to peoples throughout the Roman Empire and their deaths laid the foundation for the grassroots movement of Christianity. We, members of Epiphany Catholic Community, continue to honor their memory.

In writing to you this pastoral letter on this occasion of the two principal patrons of our Church, I want to recall their witness to Jesus Christ and to reflect on our individual and communal call to pass on the tradition that they bequeathed to us.

The Gospel reading for the Vigil Mass on this Feast comes from the very last verses of the last chapter of the Gospel of John. In his dialogue with Peter, Jesus, who is now risen, says:

“Jesus said to Peter, ‘Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this signifying by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. And when Jesus had said this, he said to Peter, ‘Follow me’” (John 21:18–19).

Saint Peter was martyred in Rome around the year A.D. 64 under the emperor Nero. The evangelist of this Gospel, traditionally known as John, wrote this dialogue in the decade of the 90s. John beautifully captures the forward and backward events surrounding the way that Jesus predicted Peter’s martyrdom and how his death in the capital city of the Roman Empire would eventually glorify God. His martyrdom symbolized God’s peaceful resistance to the powers of this world.

Saint Paul references many occasions in which he himself was imprisoned at the result of his preaching the gospel of Jesus whom God raised from the dead. The Acts of the Apostles recalls that, upon his arrest in Caesarea Philippi and his being brought to Rome, Paul *“was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.”* Paul says, *“Let it be known to you [local Jews in Rome] then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen”* (Acts 28:16, 28). On another occasion, in his prison cell in Rome between A.D. 63 and 64, Paul wrote a letter to his friend and fellow Christian, Philemon, referring to his own imprisonment: *“Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, our beloved and our co-worker”* (Phile 1:1; see also Eph 2:22–3:1). According to tradition, Saint Paul was martyred in Rome around the year A.D. 67 also under the emperor Nero. In a manner

similar to that of Peter, Paul's multiple imprisonments and ultimate martyrdom undermined all the dark forces of this world that were always at work to prevent God's salvific plans for all peoples, down to the present day.

We may observe that Jesus, during his ministry in Galilee and Jerusalem, taught his disciples that they ought to love one another (see John 13:34; 15:12; 1 John 4:12). It is Saints Peter and Paul, however, who conveyed Jesus's teaching about God's salvation and love beyond the boundaries of Galilee and Jerusalem; they carried this mission to every region and province in the Roman Empire. Little by little, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the practice of *agape* (i.e., Christian love) and the early Christians' hard labor in proclaiming God's saving plan to others became the unique way of every follower of Jesus. It is this practice and this enduring labor that prevailed over every instance of worldly power.

Today, more than ever, amidst all the chaos and darkness we find in our world and society, we are called to preserve the practice and the work of the early Christians; we are invited to work constantly by calling one another to God's saving mercy. The early Christians, such as Saints Peter and Paul, have responded to the call to spread the message and mission of Jesus. They dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ, taking unyielding comfort in their belief that God loved them and rewarded them in return with the gifts of peace that this world could not offer them.

As I undertake the responsibility of providing pastoral leadership for Epiphany Catholic Church, I wish to reach out to every member and friend of our parish. I want to reassure each and every one of you of the love and care for by the Spirit of God and Jesus, and also by me, your new pastor. With God's grace, I hope to guide our community to become a center of Jesus's inspired generous self-gift for others.

May God hold you and your family firmly in his tender care this day and always!

With blessings,

Toan Do

Father Toan Do, S.T.D, Ph.D.
Pastor