

SS Peter and Paul, 29 June 2025

Readings: Acts 12.1-11, Psalm 125, 2 Timothy 4.6-8, 17-18, Matthew 16.13-19

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

Today is 29th June. On this day the Church observes the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles and Martyrs. The root meaning of apostle is "one who is sent out" or "messenger" and the root meaning of martyr is "witness". In today's Church it is customary for men and women to be ordained deacons and priests mainly on or around 29th June. The 29th June, according to one tradition, is the date of their martyrdom in Rome during the time of persecutions under the Roman Emperor Nero. It was Tertullian who wrote, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Yesterday, Derek Lacey was ordained priest and today Rosie Evans is to be ordained priest. Both have associations with Christ Church. Derek wrote to me this week saying that he regarded Christ Church as his sending church. Remember, one of the root meanings of the word apostle is one who is sent. We have been praying for them and for others in our diocese who are being ordained at this time.

As it so happens, today also marks the 40th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood in Exeter Cathedral, Devon, having trained for the ordained ministry of the Church of England at Chichester Theological College. Unusually, I have held only four stipendiary positions: two in England and two on the continent: 1. Assistant curate of St Michael and All Angels, Heavitree, with St Paul's Burnthouse Lane, Exeter; 2. Bishop's Chaplain to Students at the University of Bradford and Bradford and Ilkley Community College; 3. Chaplain of St Boniface, Bonn, and All Saints, Cologne; and 4. since 2000, Chaplain of Christ Church, Vienna. Yes, 25 years ago plus I was licensed in this church as chaplain by Bishop John Hind, the then Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe. The first service I conducted was on the last Sunday of April 2000. In the same week, I conducted the first funeral service, that of Eugene Hartzell, an American composer and resident of Vienna. In Austria he was widely known for his

mellifluous voice, meaning “pleasingly smooth and musical to hear”. During those 25 years, I have travelled with a number of you. Thank you for your goodwill, kindnesses, and support.

The above serves as a preliminary to speaking about how the ministries of Saints Peter and Paul complement each other. In order to do so and to keep it manageable, I thought of this striking stole I was presented with in 1999. It was a generous parting gift from Bishop Joachim Vobbe for my services to the Old Catholic Church in Germany as the Chaplain spiritual to their ordinands in Bonn at Döllinger Haus. By the way, the chasuble I am wearing was given to me by my parents in 1985 on the occasion of my ordination as a priest.

On the stole, Peter is depicted on your right and Paul on your left. We begin with Peter. With one hand, he tightly holds on to the keys of the kingdom of God; with the other, he firmly clutches the net. The net representing his profession as a fisherman. From the net flows water, reminding us of the waters of our baptism, but also of Jesus’ prediction, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ (Matthew 4.18-20) Peter, together with Andrew and the other disciples, will learn how to be a witness as those who are sent into the world by proclaiming in word and deed the word and works of God so that humanity may know that in Jesus, God Himself has drawn near.

Paul on your left holds a scroll in one hand and a sword manifesting fire in the other. The scroll represents his writings, the thirteen letters attributed to him as recorded in the Bible. Fire in Paul’s writings is primarily used as a metaphor for purification, judgment, and the testing of faith. The ancient prophecy rings in our ears,

The Lord God “will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.” (Malachi 3:3)

The fire also represents a ministry that is on fire for Christ, who has made himself known to Paul in a vision. Paul will expend himself in the service to God. He writes of himself, “Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles...” (1 Corinthians 15:8) The sword reminds us that there is a spiritual struggle for the minds and souls of men and women including their bodies referred to in theology as the

Church militant, referring to the Church on earth as it seeks to live and declare Christian values, often called Kingdom values. Just as Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, so we too belong by the work of Christ to a kingdom not of this world. This will set us at odds with the kingdom and kingdoms of this world. They are legion in number and may include friends, family, colleagues, and sometimes fellow Christians.

You may have noticed that I haven't expounded on the keys of the kingdom that Peter is to receive. A biblical text that has been used to shore up and cement the primacy and authority of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, in a too restrictive and indeed exclusive way for Anglican sensitivities. Suffice it to say today that yes, as the first of the disciples, the keys are given to Peter, and there is a primacy, but it is primacy summed up in the Latin phrase *primus inter pares*, first amongst equals. Figuratively, you can only give a set of keys to one person at any one time. When the keys of the kingdom are handed to Peter symbolically, they are given to the whole Church through Peter and the apostles. Rather than seeing the authority of the Church in a single person or a single office, the office of Pope, the ministry of binding and loosing in that moment is given to the entire Church, as the Body of Christ, which is a living Temple in His name. It is a shared ministry and it is an apostolic ministry founded on the apostles, of whom Paul is one, as he states as one untimely born and of whom Christ is the cornerstone, as we sang today. Ours is an apostolic faith as in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic faith.

I have touched on the ministries of Peter and Paul using the representations of these two apostles as depicted on the stole by identifying a net and a sword, a set of keys and a scroll, water and fire. These symbols tell us that the ministries of Peter and Paul are different, but each is dependent on the other for a fuller ministry. Paul sought the laudable goal of having a ministry to all, but in order to have such a ministry, we require companions. Lange Rede kurzer Sinn. On this Feast Day of Saints Peter and Paul, we are invited to see that these two persons, very different from each other, as are their ministries, complement each other. They enrich the apostolic witness and ministry, and they seal it with their blood from which seeds even today are sown. These ministries of Peter and Paul do not stand in opposition to

each other, but are part of the one ministry that is entrusted to the Church by Christ and is at all times being powered by the Holy Spirit, strengthening, guiding, and correcting. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

The motto of Chichester Theological College is a phrase taken from 1 Peter: “guard the deposit”. Guard the deposit of faith means guard the entirety of the apostolic witness as received. Don’t cherry-pick. It means more than that: seek in humility to bend towards this witness, not playing Peter off against Paul, or God forbid, Jesus against Paul.

Paul says in his first letter to the Church in Corinth:

“For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, ... But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.”

In this moment Paul makes it clear that it does not matter who brought you the gospel, nurtured you in the faith, what matters is that you have faith and that it is built on the witness of the apostolic church. As Derek and Rosie are being ordained priests this Petertide weekend, and I mark the 40th anniversary of my priesting, I want to end by reading the job description, the to-do list, for a priest as found in the 1980 ordinal (ASB).

“A priest is called by God to work with the bishop and with his fellow priests, as servant and shepherd among the people to whom he is sent. [apostolos] He is to proclaim the word of the Lord [apostolos], to call his hearers to repentance, and in Christ's name to absolve and to declare the forgiveness of sins. He is to baptise and prepare the baptized for Confirmation. He is to preside at the celebration of the Holy Communion. He is to lead his people in prayer and worship, to intercede for them, to bless them in the name of the Lord, and to teach and encourage by word and example. He is to minister to the sick, and prepare the dying for their death. He must set the Good Shepherd always before him as the pattern of his calling, caring for the people committed to his charge, and joining with them in a common witness [martyr] to the world.”

People of God, it is at Christ Church in this very building that I learnt to inhabit the order of priest more fully across twenty-five years and above all to learn to cherish an aspect of priestly ministry namely, “To bless in the name of the Lord!” Thank you!

Finally, mindful of some words of Dag Hammarskjöld, economist, diplomat, and the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, “For all that has been, Thank you. For all that is to come, Yes!” Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. **Amen. Amen.**