

THE BOWES MUSEUM

The Bowes Museum,
Barnard Castle,
Co Durham
DL12 8NP

01833 690606

info@thebowesmuseum.org.uk

www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk

For more information about other booklets
prepared by Sister Michael
in 'The God Who Speaks - through Art' series
or for other resources, visit: www.rcdhn.org.uk/

THE
GOD
WHO
SPEAKS

DIOCESE OF Hexham & Newcastle

BOWES MUSEUM, BARNARD CASTLE



THE
GOD
WHO
SPEAKS

THROUGH
ART

Using pictures to help us pray with the Word of God

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL FRACANZANO, 1612-56



Read:

Gaze at these pictures. Look at the power and strength exuding from these two pillars of the church.

The names Peter and Paul are inseparable: Peter the rock, the outspoken, impulsive, lovable follower of Christ who became the chief Shepherd, the first Pope; Paul, the strong, sturdy, tireless preacher and evangelist who took the Good News of God's love in Christ through the known world.

They represent the two aspects of the church – authority, leadership, centralisation (Peter) and the church forever reaching out to others, sharing the Good News of salvation for all (Paul)

Both have penetrating looks, both are champions of Christ and the Gospel. Peter holds the keys of authority-binding and loosing- Paul holds the book of the Gospel – Good news for all. Both have fought good fight and finished the race (*cf* 1 Timothy 6: 11-12)

Reflect:

We need both aspects of the church – stability, solid teaching, clear and inspired leadership, now centred in Pope Francis, successor of Peter; and a dynamic, ever-growing church with a message of hope for all.

It is estimated that Paul walked 9,000 miles on foot apart from his journeys by sea. Look at his soiled, mis-shapen feet, worn out by his labours.

Today, Pope Francis urges us to be missionary disciples like Peter and Paul, to carry on their work for Christ. But there is a cost. Both were martyred - Peter by being crucified upside down; Paul by being beheaded (see the sword in his hand) – both in the year 67AD, both in Rome. Today there are splendid basilicas over their tombs. Their joint feast is June 29th.

Let these facts challenge us and inspire us to follow in their footsteps.

Reflect:

They are so different and yet united. They confronted each other in life and disagreed vehemently and publicly yet during the first Church meeting in Jerusalem it was Peter who defended Paul and his vision of a church for all. They are members of the Body of Christ, both fiercely dedicated, both giving their all even to death.

Both knew what it was to sin and fail. Peter betrayed Jesus, repented and was forgiven; Paul had to be knocked to the ground to hear Jesus, to realise that he was working against him and to allow his life to be turned around. Both were instrumental in the establishment and growth of the early church through their boldness, spiritual strength and wisdom.

This icon calls us to unity. Unity is strength. We need each other with our differences; we need to accept and forgive each other.

Ponder on these truths

Respond: Say this prayer slowly:

Almighty God, whose blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, glorified you by their martyrdom; grant that your church, instructed by their teaching and example, and knit together in unity by your Spirit, may ever stand firm upon the one foundation which is Jesus Christ Our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

(Prayer for the feast of Sts Peter and Paul)

- + Pray for Pope Francis and all leaders of the church that they may lead us to Christ.
- + Pray for the church in its present crisis. There will always be weakness and sin but unity and truth must and will prevail. Dwell on Jesus' promise to be with us always and thank God that we have been chosen to belong to this family of faith.
- + Pray for the unity of all Christians.

Rest: Think of Paul's words "I live not now but Christ lives in me".

Be aware that Christ is in us living and working through us. Rest in thankfulness.

Return:

Renewed in faith, let us resolve to witness to what we believe. We are the Church. Let us not be afraid of our identity.

ICON OF PETER AND PAUL EMBRACING



Read:

Gaze on the icon and allow yourself to be in the presence of these two great apostles. They are so different: Peter, a simple fisherman from Galilee. There is a rugged honesty about him, a born leader. Paul, an intellectual, a Pharisee, a Roman citizen from Tarsus, cultured but fanatical in his devotion to Christ – a very complex character. Peter always recognisable by his full head of hair and rounded face; Paul balding with a hooked nose receding forehead, and scraggy beard. (a second century description). Peter, chosen by Jesus as the Rock on which he would build his church, Paul also chosen “to be my instrument to bring faith to the Gentiles”. Peter was with Jesus throughout his ministry and almost to the cross. He met him in the flesh after his resurrection. Paul never met Jesus in the flesh. He was converted on the road to Damascus and received his commission in a vision. They both look beyond. They both invite us to gaze on God through Christ however we know him, whoever we are, whatever our experience.

Respond:

- + Pray for Pope Francis as he continues the work of Peter and Paul, teacher of us all and reaching out to the whole world. Think of his enormous task, his journeys, his reaching out to the faithful, to the poor and marginalised, to the migrants and to those of other faiths, his protection of the environment.
- + Pray that the church may weather all storms and difficulties of preaching against the prevailing culture
- + Pray that the church may never lose its missionary zeal, that it may reach out to all, rich and poor, male and female, Christian and non-Christian with a message of inclusion
- + Pray that we may always have witnesses like Peter and Paul ready to lay down their lives if necessary for the sake of the Gospel.
- + Pray for those who are being persecuted today and suffering for their faith.

Rest:

Rest in trust and gratitude for the gift of faith and especially for the promise of Christ to be with his church until the end of time

Return to daily life:

Strengthened and uplifted by the example of these two great saints and resolve to stand up and be counted as a faithful witness of Christ.



THE TEARS OF PETER by EL GRECO 1587-96

Read:

This is not the confident Peter holding the keys of authority (some say the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.) This is a man who knows he has done something utterly and unspeakably terrible. It is a picture of anguish and atonement. Peter raises his tear-filled eyes to heaven, hands clasped in prayer as he repents of his denial of Jesus. Recall the incident – late at night, Peter approaching the charcoal fire in the court of the High Priest while Jesus is being tried, challenged by a servant girl, and swearing and cursing that he did not know the man. betray you”.



The same Peter who had boasted “Even if all these betray you, I will never betray you.

Reflect:

Why did Peter let Jesus down? Cowardice? Fear? Arrogance? Weakness?

This picture captures the moment of truth, the awful realisation that he had publicly denied ever knowing his Lord.

What led to his repentance – the look of Jesus penetrating his soul? The sense of his own stupidity and boastfulness?

Was this genuine sorrow and was Peter the better for it?

El Greco’s Peter is not only saintly, he is profoundly human. That is why we can so easily identify with him.

Respond:

In the background is the empty tomb with Mary Magdalen and the angel nearby. El Greco uses the bright light and flashing sky to heighten the drama of the moment and to arouse in the viewer a spiritual fervour, a recognition of our own sin, the times when we too have denied Christ. In your own words, express your sorrow and pray to Peter for the grace of conversion.

Rest:

Quietly identify with Peter in his shame and sorrow and feel Christ looking at you with love and understanding. Surrender yourself to his love and forgiveness.

Return to daily life:

Strengthened by the knowledge that whatever our weakness and sin, Jesus embraces us and will not give up on us. After all, Peter was re-instated as the Rock and Founder of the church after his humiliating disgrace. Will Christ be less generous with us?