

# **Different Paths to Holiness**

Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

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The Preface is the name of the prayer at the altar beginning with 'The Lord be with you...lift up your hearts...let us give thanks to the Lord our God' and ending with the people singing the 'Holy, Holy, Holy.' There are dozens of options in the Roman Missal, some more generic and others based on the feast or season. Today, we have a Preface used just for today, the Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, and it is one of my favorites. It says,

For by your providence the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul bring us joy: Peter, foremost in confessing the faith, Paul, its outstanding preacher, Peter, who established the early Church from the remnant of Israel, Paul, master and teacher of the Gentiles that you call. And so, each in a different way gathered together the one family of Christ.

I like this Preface so much because as we can see, Sts. Peter and Paul may share a feast day, but they were vastly different people.

One of the historical errors we have made as a church has been to collapse the rich diversity of holiness found already in the New Testament itself into a single storyline of what holiness should be. In his 2018 writing, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad),

Pope Francis reminded us of a very important point: each person has their own unique pathway to holiness. He wrote,

There are some testimonies that may prove helpful and inspiring, but that we are not meant to copy, for that could even lead us astray from the one specific path that the Lord has in mind for us. The important thing is that each believer discern his or her own path, that they bring out the very best of themselves, the most personal gifts that God has placed in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7), rather than hopelessly trying to imitate something not meant for them. We are all called to be witnesses, but there are many actual ways of bearing witness. (11)

In other words, Pope Francis accurately teaches that there is not a 'one size fits all' to being a saint. We are all called to holiness, but how that holiness appears in each person will be very different based on circumstances, gifts, vocations, and needs of the present moment.

In many cultures, whenever Catholics are preparing for the sacraments of Baptism or Confirmation, they are required to take a 'saint name' or a 'Christian name.' This is a great practice, but at the same time, I always worry that by doing so, we are not broadening the pool of the communion of saints. Instead of saying that a name is not Christian or does not have a saint attached to it, wouldn't it be much better if we encouraged that person to become the first canonized saint with that name? The doctrine of

the Communion of Saints truly is a doctrine about the best of diversity.

*Saints Peter and Paul teach us that the pathways to holiness are unique to each one of us.*

What are my gifts or circumstances that make me unique?  
How can I use my uniqueness for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray that we may not compare ourselves to others or compete with others on the paths to holiness. Each of us has our own path to find and to follow. May the words about Sts. Peter and Paul in today's Preface also one day be said about all of us: "and so, each in a different way gathered together the one family of Christ."