

## Peter and Paul

Today is the feast of St Peter and St Paul.

These men had a massive influence on the foundations of our faith. Through their teachings and practice they had a massive influence on the development of Western Civilisation. Indeed when we consider that a Christian tradition as old as Rome exists in Ethiopia, in India, and in the Arab world, the true significance of these historical figures is quite staggering.

What is perhaps more staggering is that they both began as failures.

St Peter was almost the fall guy in the Gospel. "Get behind me Satan", "again Peter denied it; and at once the cock crew"

Then St Paul the great persecutor of the Church. He had entirely approved of the killing of St Stephen the first martyr. He was actually on his way to persecute the church in Damascus when his dramatic conversion happened.

They had both got it very badly wrong

Never the less upon from these two a lot of the church and its teaching emerged.

Failure here seen as part of the development of sanctity.

Failure and reconciliation seen as part of the development of faith.

Failure not simply as weakness, but as a tool used in the liberation of self.

In any classroom there is the challenge getting the sum correct. The parent is pleased, when the child reports getting ten out of ten. But what will the child learn if the results are always perfect. It would seem to me that if there were consistent 100% marks then the questions asked are not challenging the child enough. The fantastic potential for a deeper understanding of the subject, is being denied, by a lazy teacher, or a weak syllabus.

If there is no searching. No struggling. No points of failure. Then there is surly little real learning.

Failure is a part of the process of learning.

I suspect that if you have never failed then you have never really tried to move beyond your comfort zone.

Then there is the terrible consequence of the fear of failure.

In the past there has been a fault in our society, whereby our value has not been judged as a result of the content of our character, but as a consequence of our position in the class system. Often now within certain areas of society it is our academic achievement that gives us status. "So and so" is a highly qualified lawyer, and is thus given great respect, although as an individual is a complete Pratt.

Or in business. "So and so" is rich and so is given the best seats, despite the fact that the performance is only valued as a result of its cost.

So frightened are many of being condemned by these new systems of value judgement that they shy away from the challenges presented. Confusing the justification for learning simply with the results. Terrified of failing they either avoid the challenge, or wrap themselves up in a useless anxiety which robs them of both the joy and the potential of development.

If it is worth passing it is worth failing

If it is worth achieving, it is worth losing

What is more it is in the approach to the crisis that your real character is judged

Not the details of your bank balance or "O" level paper results.

God will not ask what you got in geography.

Those who have never failed have never tried

Those who have never tried

have really failed.

Then of course within the tradition of Christianity, within the life of St Paul, within the experience of St Peter is the liberation of forgiveness.

The God given capacity to fail, to accept what I am, and to begin again.

The hardest person to forgive is yourself.

It is OK to fail

But those who will not accept failure, are trapped within their own limitations.

The anger addressed at the children was a result of the deeply felt insecurity of the parents.

The lack of investment in the relationship was as a result of a total defence of perceived vulnerability

The illness grew for fear of what the doctor might say

But you are not perfect, there is insecurity, you are vulnerable, and your body is subject to the laws of nature and age.

Forgive yourself, accept yourself, and be prepared to fail

Then in the humility of that freedom

Live forgiven like St Peter

Live forgiven like St Paul

Live in the faith that the Son of God calls you to

Live in the liberation of potential failure.