

FRIDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2020

In our first reading from Acts of the Apostles we get official confirmation that Saint Paul will go to Rome for his case to be heard by Caesar. This is better covered in the longer version of the text in Universalis, available from the website [olaspandstjosephs.org.uk](http://olaspandstjosephs.org.uk)

By virtue of his status as a Roman Citizen, Paul can present the Gospel of Christ to the widest audience. His testimony helps lay the foundations for the whole of the Roman Empire to adopt our faith under the instruction of Constantine, a later Emperor of Rome.

When a Pope is elected it is common for them to change names. As he is no longer speaking for himself but for the whole Church, the new Holy Father may assume the name of a previous figure that had something to say in his time but with a message still relevant today. When Giovanni Montini was elected Pope, he changed his name to Paul, the great evangeliser.

The following biography is from Universalis. It is worth reading especially as Paul VI is a saint who lived during the lives of many of us. Incidentally, he was a favourite of my mum. The Gospel reflection follows.



#### **Pope St Paul VI (1897-1978)**

Giovanni Battista Montini was born on 26 September 1897 in the village of Concesio, in the province of Brescia, Lombardy. He was ordained priest on 29 May 1920 and worked in the Roman Curia, the Vatican civil service, until he was made Archbishop of Milan in 1954. He was elected Pope on 21 June 1963, successfully saw the Vatican Council through to its completion, promoted the renewal of the Church's life and especially of the liturgy. He also promoted ecumenical dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel to the

modern world. He died on 6 August 1978.

**He was canonized by Pope Francis in 2018.**

In a reflection from 5 August 1963, one and a half months after his election to the See of Peter, Paul VI wrote: *"I must return to the beginning: relationship with Christ... that must be the source of the most sincere humility: 'leave me, for I am a sinful man...'; be it in availability: 'I will make you fishers...'; be it in the symbiosis of will and grace: 'for me to live is Christ...'"*.

Love for Christ and love for his Church. With good reason he could write in *Pensiero alla morte*: *"I pray that the Lord will give me the grace to make of my approaching death a gift of love to the Church. I can say that I have always loved her and I feel that I have lived my life for her and for nothing else"*.

When the Holy Spirit chose him as the Successor of Saint Peter, someone already taken by the figure and apostolic activity of Saint Paul, he did not spare his energies in the service of the Gospel of Christ, of the Church and of humanity, seen in the light of the divine plan of salvation. As his teachings show he was a defender of human life, peace and true human progress. He wanted the Church, inspired by the Council and implementing its normative principles, to rediscover ever more her identity, overcoming the divisions of the past and by being ever more attentive to the new age. He wanted the Church of Christ to place the centrality of God and the preaching of the Gospel in the first place, even when she spends herself in the service of the brothers and sisters, in order to build that "civilisation of love" begun by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In *Notes for my Last Will and Testament*, Paul VI wrote: *"No monument for me"*. Even if a monument was erected in the Duomo of Milan in October 1989, the true monument to Saint Paul VI is the one built by his witness, his works, his apostolic journeys, his ecumenism, his work on the revised Vulgate, in the Liturgical renewal and his many teachings and examples by which he showed forth the face of Christ, the mission of the Church, the vocation of contemporary humanity and reconciling Christian thought with the requirements of the difficult moment in which he, with much suffering, had to guide the Church.

**GOSPEL REFLECTION:** We may recall Peter at the Last Supper in the Upper Room pledging unfailing loyalty to Jesus. Jesus grounds his protestations when Our Lord says to him, Before the Cock crows, you will have betrayed me three times. We are all too familiar with the events as they unfolded that night & how Peter's loyalty was on the slide. We are told that Peter wept bitterly because of his own weakness & the culmination of all the events of that time. He was to carry the guilt of betraying his friend for some time.

Such emotions can destroy or can be transformative. In today's Gospel we see how Jesus changes all that pain into a point of strength for Saint Peter. At the dawn of a new day, during one of the times that Jesus appears having conquered death, Jesus asks Peter repeatedly if he loves Him. The pain for Peter of being interrogated by his friend must have cut him to the quick. But it was to lance all this pain that Jesus persisted. As it is recorded that Peter denied knowing Jesus three times on the night Our Saviour was taunted, spat at & flogged, Jesus allows Peter to heal the wounds these denials made. The canker is removed & the scars in their relationship can heal.

This incident is recorded by the Gospel writer because of the pain of that night before. As the sun rises by the shores of the lake, Peter is made whole again, absolution given & a Peter sent out anew.

Whilst we may all be able to see ourselves in this Gospel, presenting ourselves before Jesus for the same healing, this reading is especially important with reference to our church leaders. Pope Saint Paul VI would have had any number of opportunities to deny the influence of Jesus in his ministry. Pope Francis is faced with decisions every day that effect how people view the Catholic Church. Let us pray for our present Christian leaders that they have the vision & strength to be good examples in Christian discipleship.