

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Filipino Pilgrimage in Honor of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage

*Filipino Pilgrimage in Honor of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage*

*Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*

*Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*

*Washington, D.C.*

*June 29, 2019*

## **The Navigator and the Explorer**

I am happy and honored to be a part of this pilgrimage in honor of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage. For nearly 400 years, Blessed Mary has watched over sailors and travelers who faced the dangers of the sea as they made their way to and from the Philippines. And today, in honoring Mary's loving protection for seafarers, we also honor two intrepid mariners, two saints on this, their feast day, two saints who still guide the Church as she journeys through the stormy waters of history: St. Peter, the fisherman and, if you will, the Church's "navigator"; and St. Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, and if you will, the Church's courageous "explorer". Surrounded by Mary's maternal care, let us reflect on how it is that Sts. Peter and Paul continue to guide the Church in times both good and difficult, and how they thus help us on our homeward journey, towards the shores of heaven.

## **Saint Peter, the Fisherman and the Church's 'Navigator'**

St. Matthew tells us that Peter was a fisherman when Jesus called him: "As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea... And he said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:18-20). But the sailing, my friends, was not entirely smooth. On one occasion, Jesus was in a boat with his disciples when a furious storm erupted that threatened to sink the boat and to drown all aboard. Terrified, they awoke Jesus saying, "Teacher, don't you care if we perish?" (Mk.

8:38) On another occasion, Peter and the disciples were in a boat tossed about by the waves. In the darkness of night, they saw Jesus walking upon the waters. They were terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus tried to reassure them but Peter said to him, "Lord, if it is really you, command me to come to you on the water." "Come," Jesus said, but when Peter experienced the headwinds, he began to sink. Jesus upbraided Peter - "O ye of little of faith!"

The scene is very different in today's Gospel, where Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares with astonishing clarity that Jesus is neither Elijah nor John the Baptist; Rather, he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was at that very moment that Jesus chose Peter to lead his Apostles, to be navigator of his Church which in time would be called 'the Barque of Peter'. For the Church, "true north" will always be Peter's confession of faith in Jesus as truly the Son of God and the Son of Mary, as the anointed of God, as the Incarnate Savior of the world - he and no other. With their hearts set in one direction, towards Christ the Lord, St. Peter and his successors guide the Church through the stormy seas of history. Thus, on this feast we acclaim St. Peter as our utterly reliable "navigator".

### **Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles and the Church's Courageous 'Explorer'**

If it is Peter who navigates the Church, it is Paul who teaches her how to explore every path by land and sea so as to bring the Gospel to every nation and to every culture. Indeed, St. Paul himself made three missionary voyages, and, as he tells us in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians, he was shipwrecked three times. To say that Paul suffered shipwreck doesn't mean that he shipwrecked the Church! It does mean that Paul, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, was courageous and tireless in spreading the faith far and wide, throughout much of the Roman Empire. St. Paul feared neither of the dangers of the sea nor the sacrifice of the apostolate, but instead devoted himself entirely to proclaiming Christ crucified and risen, no matter how fierce the headwinds, no matter grave the danger, and, in the end, he gave his very life in witness of the Christ he had proclaimed. As St. Paul says to us in today's reading from the 2nd Letter to Timothy, [In all these hardships] "[t]he Lord stood by me and gave me strength...." He adds, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom".

Paul's seafaring missionary journeys remind us (do they not?) of the sea voyages undertaken by those magnificent Filipino saints, San Lorenzo Ruiz and San Pedro Calungsod:

San Lorenzo, a layman, a married man with a wonderful family, found himself framed for a murder he did not commit and forced to flee. But he did not go looking merely for a hideaway for his own protection. Rather, he joined with the Dominican friars on a missionary journey that brought him across the sea to Nagasaki. There, he and his companions courageously bore witness to Christ, Son of the living God and diligently taught the Church's faith - only to be captured and made to die a very slow and painful death by their persecutors. Urged to abandon his faith, San Lorenzo cried out,

"I will never do it! I am a Catholic and I am happy to die for God. If I had a thousand lives to offer, I would offer them all to God!"

So too, Peter Calungsod, while still a very young man, became a catechist. He too heard the call to missionary discipleship, so with a band of Jesuit missionaries, he sailed to the Marianas Islands, including present-day Guam. San Pedro and his companions endured great hardships but like Paul, they pressed on, preaching the Faith, instructing catechists, baptizing infants and adults, all the while aware that they were in grave danger. In the midst of these hardships, San Pedro remained kind and patient, spreading the faith not by force but by the power of love, so much so, that when the moment for his martyrdom arrived, he offered no resistance but like Peter willingly offered his life in testimony to Christ, to "Christ, the Son of the living God" and like St. Paul proclaimed, in effect, "For me, life is Christ, and death is gain" (Philippians 1:22).

## **Two Petitions for Our Lady of Good Voyage**

All of which brings us back to the devotion that drew us here today, the beautiful image of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, enshrined in the Cathedral Shrine of Antipolo, near Manila, and the precious replica of that image here in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Like the generations that have preceded us over these past 400 years, we are seeking her protection as we journey through life - seeking safe passage through the challenges and dangers that

surround us. Can we not think of a thousand favors for which we'd like to ask our Blessed Lady as we worry about the challenges and headwinds which we and our families face? Yet, taking our cue today from Saint Peter and Saint Paul, I would suggest that we beg Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage for two things:

First, let us ask that, as we plot the course of our lives and seek to guide our young, we would follow the direction pointed out to us by Peter, the navigator of the Church, when he declared Christ to be the Son of the living God. Yes, let us hold fast to Peter's confession of faith, teaching it to our children, celebrating it in the Mass, in popular devotions, and prayer groups. Let us worship and follow the Christ as "the way and our guide along the way" - as we journey through life towards our ultimate destination, 'life on high with Christ'. So let us beg Mary, Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, for a faith that is strong, complete, and loving, a faith in accord with that of Peter, so that we will never veer off course by abandoning the Church and her teachings.

Second, as we plot the course of our lives and seek to guide our young, let us ask our Patroness not to allow us to remain in our comfort zone, pursuing our interests and suffering from the inner emptiness of a covetous heart. Let us rather ask that, like St. Paul, we would be willing and eager to explore all the pathways by which we too might bear witness to Christ and carry his message of truth and love to others, without fearing rejection, persecution, or even shipwreck! With St. Paul to guide us and Our Lady to protect us, we too can be courageous missionaries, like San Lorenzo and San Pedro, who effectively communicate the faith to family members, friends, and co-workers, yes, even in this time when the Church itself is beset by scandal and controversy.

Guided by St. Peter, urged on by St. Paul, protected by Our Lady of Good Voyage, may we declare by our every word and deed that Christ is the Son of the living God. Through her intercession may 'nothing ever separate us from the love of Christ'! And may God bless us and keep us always in his love!