

Sunday 28 June 2026 – Feast of SS Peter and Paul

Zechariah 4. 1-6a, 10b-end; Acts 12. 1-11; Matthew 16. 13-19

At this time of year those who have been selected for ordination in the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, will have been gathering in retreat in all the dioceses of the world. This is because they have all been selected, some three years earlier, for special training to enable their ordination to take place. This training consists of historical, theological, Biblical, liturgical, educational and ministerial subject matter; Fr Nigel will have undertaken this over 40 years ago, and in my case it is coming up to 20 years, after a career in quite a different situation.

People of many backgrounds come together for these three years, to experience being transformed from the person they have been up to now into something more demanding and also more rewarding than before. They will be, in some cases, a person who has no previous leadership experience, and in others quite the opposite. It is a very humbling time for all, and new interesting friendships are made in the changing of hearts and minds.

Being open to change is evidence of the transformation taking place within them through the three years. But why is everything happening at just this time in the church's year, when we are celebrating two famous apostles and disciples: Peter and Paul ?

That is exactly the point. They come from opposite poles of society, Peter as a humble fisherman with very little formal education, and Paul formerly Saul as a Pharisee of considerable authority with copious knowledge of the Jewish Law. He had distinguished himself by his implacable persecution of the followers of the New Way, as we know from the earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

Both come at the arrival of Jesus among them in completely different ways: Peter is someone whose heart governs his thoughts and actions, and Paul is the opposite. It takes a blinding vision of Jesus to reverse him in his tracks – literally.

Peter is the only one who acknowledges Jesus for who he is, in answering Jesus's question to all the disciples in today's Gospel: "Who do you say that I am?" by replying "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." It is true Peter later denies Jesus, out of fear of what might happen to him, but he later redeems himself and finally establishes the Kingdom of Christ in Rome, as Paul does in other parts of the world.

"Who do you say that I am?" is the crucial question being asked of all those who will have been ordained in Bury St Edmunds yesterday. I can remember my own ordination in Southwark Cathedral and my interview with the Bishop shortly before: he asked me if I had anything I wanted to say, and I said I was acutely aware of my unworthiness to take on such a position. He replied that, firstly, I had been tested over a period of at least three years to discern my suitability, and, secondly, during the ordination service he would be laying hands on me and praying for the Holy Spirit to be with me in whatever the future might hold for me. I have never forgotten those words.

This is also what happened yesterday in Bury Cathedral. Recognising that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, is crucial to the ordination process. But not only for deacons and priests, it is also essential for all Christian lay people, who have a duty to be confident about what they believe in. This applies not just to Sundays, but to every other day of the week. Otherwise a conversation with Jesus would begin with each of us asking him "Who do **you** say that I am?" and I wonder what his reply would be.

In the meantime let's pray for all those now ordained as deacon or priest and wish them every blessing for their future ministry, wherever it may

take them. They are: Cathie Fraser (Melton & Ufford), Karen Lawson and Peter Plummer (St John's Woodbridge with Bredfield). Let's also thank God for the ministry of SS Peter and Paul, and for showing us that if they could do it, then so can we !