SOLEMNITY OF ST. PETER AND ST. PAUL (June 29, 2014)

**READINGS:** Acts 12:1-11 / 2 Tim. 4: 6-8, 17-18/ Matthew 16:13-19
**THEME:** **Great Pillars of our Faith:** **From Grass to Grace**

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It is not unusual in life to find people falling from high places of honour or riches to low levels of shame or disgrace. Such cases are often referred to as “falling from **grace to grass**”. On the contrary, the two great saints whom we celebrate today rose up from **grass to grace**. St. Peter rose from being a betrayer of Christ to become the rock on which the Lord has built His church (Mt. 16:13-19). And St. Paul arose from being a staunch persecutor of Christ and His Church to become, arguably, the most outstanding and tireless Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 8:1-4; 9:3-9, 15). As we celebrate their solemn feast, let us ask for the grace of turn-around in our lives: that we may also rise up from our low spiritual status to a high one; and that even socially many more will move to higher statuses in life.

Secondly, associated with the two saints’ rising from **grass to grace** is the change of their names. There is something we can learn from that (*see homily on “Zacchaeus – Called by Name”*). Simon became Peter and Saul became Paul. (Interestingly, each of them began with a name which begins with “S” and ended up with a name with “P”). Let us now look at the names of the first saint. His name “Simon” means “hearing”, while “Peter” means “rock”. Did our Lord Jesus Christ not say that whoever hears His words and puts them into practice is like a man who built his house on rock, whereas the one who does not put them into practice is like a man who built on sand (Mt. 7:24-27)? Thus, one could say that the grace of Christ turned the man, Simon, who heard (but took little action) into a solid “rock” man who acted on what he heard. Beloved, this is a reminder that it does not pay to be mere hearers of God’s Word; while there are manifold blessings in being doers of the Word (James 1:22-25).

Now, the name “Saul” means “asked for” or “demanded”. Remember how in the Old Testament, the Israelites “asked for” or “demanded” to have their own king, Saul (1 Samuel 8:4-9:2). On the other hand, the name “Paul” means “little”. Thus, the grace of Christ changed a man, who did things (for God) in his own way, into a “little” (i.e. “humble”) instrument for the conversion of thousands of souls across the world (Acts 9:15). Yes, St. Paul became a very effective instrument of God once he became humble: “whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (Mt. 23:12). Having been schooled in humility, St. Paul would in turn teach us:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the very nature of God,

did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

but made himself nothing,

taking the very natureof a servant,

being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

and became obedient to death —

even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5-11).

Beloved, let us be humble in our thoughts and deeds; for anytime we acknowledge in thoughts and deeds that we are like **grass** before the Lord (Ps. 90:5-6; 102:11), He fills us with **divine grace**. **PRAYER**: “Lord God, like St. Peter, make us as firm as a rock in faith and action. And like St. Paul, make us your humble and effective instruments of salvation. Amen!”