

St James' Church, Weybridge

Monday 29th June 2026 - Peter and Paul, Apostles

Introduction and Call to Worship

As we call to mind the faith and obedience of St Peter and St Paul, let us follow their example as we offer our worship and respond to God's word.

Today's Readings

First Reading Zechariah 4:1-6a, 10-14

The angel shows the prophet a strange vision, which includes two olive trees. They represent two "anointed ones" who are worthy to stand with God.

or Acts 12:1-11

God sends an angel to free Peter from Herod's imprisonment. Unbinding Peter, the angel leads him past guards and through gates. Once outside, Peter realises his rescue is no dream.

Second Reading 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17, 18

Paul, in prison chains, reflects on the completion of his ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, confident that God's past strength and protection will continue to uphold him into glory.

Gospel Matthew 16:13-19

Peter answers Jesus' questions about his identity by affirming Jesus as the Messiah.

Rejoicing at Peter's responsiveness to God's revelation, Jesus declares he will build his Church on such apostolic faith.

HOMILY

Keys are so important. Here's my bunch... well without them I couldn't open all the doors in this church - or the Rectory, come to mention it – and let's be honest there are a lot of doors and cupboards here!

Keys are so important. At the Induction of a new priest the Bishop hands a key to the new priest. It is part of a tradition which dates back hundreds of years in which the cure of souls, or in layman's terms, the responsibility for overseeing the spirituality of a parish, is handed to the priest – which is shared by the Bishop and priest equally. 'I induct you to the cure of souls in this parish, which is both yours and mine.' Said Bishop Andrew Watson at my Induction here three and a half years ago.

So when we think of St Peter as the one who holds the keys of the kingdom what are we implying? Well it is no accident that the successor to Peter, a Bishop should retain the cure of souls with the presbyter or priest, who after all humbly stands in place of the Bishop at the altar every day. The priestly task of the clergy here in Weybridge is primarily spiritual; to hold each one of you, in prayer, before God. The Ordinal, is the liturgical service used by the Church of England for the ordination of bishops, priests, and deacons, setting out the duties, promises, and spiritual responsibilities of ordained ministry. It has its origins back in 1550, and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's original Ordinal. At my Ordination as a priest 23 years ago and Fr Tom's at Guildford Cathedral just a year ago (where has that time gone?) the same words were used. And they all have their origin in God's call to Peter, the first who names Jesus as the Son of the Living God.

We heard this moment of revelation in today's Gospel, from Matthew chapter sixteen as a lowly fisherman named Simon reveals Jesus' identity. Our Lord replies, 'Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. Then Simon is re-named by Jesus as Peter, which translates as 'Rock' and Jesus then tells Peter that on his shoulders the church would be built. Peter then is considered the first ever Bishop and given the spiritual responsibility, the Cure of Souls, for the Christian people of his time. He must do this by 'feeding the sheep'.

Jesus hands Simon Peter a wonderful set of spiritual keys... to Heaven, the keys of the promised Kingdom; but in return, Peter has spiritual work to do among the people, both far and near. Just like the induction service, the priest receives the challenge and the keys. Yet there is a sting in the tail as we read on in the Gospel and Jesus sternly orders them not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah.

They can't tell anyone? Why, we may ask, for in the world today it is something to be proclaimed is it not? Having a large set of keys conveys power, authority and responsibility. But for Jesus, his identity is to be revealed in people's hearts – the Lord of life and love is experienced when people's lives are challenged and changed and those keys are the keys to the world and our hearts, as much as heaven itself. They are keys to the place Christ longs to dwell within each one of us.

Jesus knows that the challenges that lie ahead for Peter are great. The same is true of Paul. Elements of Peter's call are echoed in the life of his fellow early church 'apostle to the apostles', Paul. Though from a different background in terms of religious pedigree and secular privilege, Paul was also questioned by Jesus in an isolated, northern location on the road to Damascus. This was to be a turning point for this persecutor of the new Church. "Saul" said Jesus, "why are you persecuting me?" Paul's ultimate acknowledgement that Jesus was truly one who called for his worship, not his hatred, led to a redirection of his life so profound that it also involved a renaming. Saul become Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles (or non Jews).

From self-important Saul, we find zealous "Paul", which actually is a name that simply means little: becoming small in the world's eyes that he might grow in the stature of heaven. You know at the heart of these conversion and call experiences lie two ordinary and yet wonderful people, called by Jesus to be extraordinary leaders of his Church. They were called from the old religious life into a new life of faith. Jesus calls people to service, ordinary, basic, human women and men. People just like you and somewhat surprisingly, me.

And to make that connection with each one of us part of us must be unlocked. Our souls must be opened up to know God and trust, and then, faith can grow. Our faith sees us through so much, just as Peter and Paul

were kept 'blameless' before God in the faith. You see my friends, whatever people may say, Christianity is all about faith in Jesus Christ and what he has done and is continuing to do in the world today, and in our lives, NOW! Every single person has this spiritual dimension.

But as we affirm who Jesus is, we will also discover who we are. We cannot be complete without Jesus. And naming Jesus as our Saviour is not a one off event but part of a lifetime of commitment and service in the name of our Lord. So faithful people of Weybridge, the question to each one of us must be posed: Are we ready, like Peter and Paul to name Jesus as Lord once more and then, for our skills, talents and experience to be redirected into new avenues?

Are we willing to accept the bundle of keys that Jesus has for each one of us? Keys that will unlock both our own, and others hearts for the glory of the Kingdom of God? There is work to be done here in this place, there are souls to be found and loved, there are hearts that are broken to be made whole, there are dreams that are to be realised and all in the love and power of God. Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, June 2026