

## Peter and Paul; drawn to the love of Christ.

Today's Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, brings to mind its own set of familiar images. I wonder though if their original calling, just ever so slightly, tweaks our minds so as to think about them from the perspective of our own calling. If we were to go back to the very beginning and think about their first encounter with Jesus, we receive something unique and very special; something which I hope can help us as we endeavour to live out our Christian vocation.

If we go to the Gospel of John and read the call of Simon the first thing you notice is that he is not called by Jesus at all. The person who first encounters Jesus before Simon is his brother Andrew, and it is Andrew who persuades Simon to come and meet Jesus. Now, having met with Jesus and no doubt engaged in conversation with him, Jesus makes no demand of him at all. There is no call "to follow" him, nor to set everything aside and leave it all behind. All that Jesus does is look at him and tell him who he is and, what is of the utmost relevance, who he is to be. How strange is that? Simon is left with a sense of uncertainty. His status has been defined, yet his future left in limbo, curious isn't it? But in a strange way isn't this is how we all feel in the presence of Jesus. He can look at each one of us and define us and connect with whatever is restless within us. Furthermore he asks us to explore where this restlessness will take us. In doing this Jesus draws us ever closer to himself so that the love with which he looks at us, becomes the defining character attracting us to him. It is only at the very end of the gospel, after the love of Simon for Jesus has been tested and dissected and found to be all pervading, that Simon now finally receives his call to follow.

Paul as you know makes no appearance in any of the gospels. His first appearance is in the Acts of the Apostles where he stands as a brooding presence at the stoning of Stephen, after which he begins a persecution of the early followers of Christ. He was, as he tells us himself, strident in his belief; a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents, of the tribe of Benjamin, yet suddenly and dramatically, he changes. What could have happened to produce such a turnaround? Of course it is impossible to say and the description which we have in the Acts of the Apostles is if anything, an attempt to dramatise the moment with evocative imagery designed to do whatever "the event" was, justice. To get some insight into how this moment changed Paul so radically, we must read what Paul himself says in his Letter to the Galatians: *when God, who had set me apart from the time when I was in my mother's womb called me through his grace and chose to reveal his son in me*, is how he puts it. However perplexing it was, and certainly life changing! What happens then is revealing. There is a three year gap when seemingly he is out of circulation, incognito, in contact with no-one from the Church. I just wonder if like Simon, Paul too was being gently drawn by the love of Christ into a relationship with him. I wonder if his restlessness and zeal was being nurtured and fashioned and dissected by the Risen Lord, to be brought finally to fruition as the apostle of the gentiles.

We may wonder what it is that Christ asks of us? All we can know is that Jesus' love will work in us just as it did for Peter and Paul, and if we are open to this love, it will draw us ever closer to him.