

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, B – June 29, 2018 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Fraternus Ranch, Day One, Ocoee Camp, Copperhill, Tennessee – 1,100 words

How great it is that we are able to start our summer Ranch experience on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul – reminding us that the Church we belong to is founded by Christ on the foundation of the Apostles! The apostles were all men with their own struggles and weaknesses; they were all quite different – rather like us gathered here. Their title of “apostles” – a Greek word – tells us that they were sent by Christ into the world to bear witness to him. This is our calling also – it is the calling of followers of Christ and members of his Church in every age. Hopefully, we in Fraternus are learning what it takes to fulfill this call in an exemplary way, by living lives of virtue and embracing and living our Catholic faith to the full.

There is so much that we could say about both Ss. Peter and Paul in connection with who we are and what we do as Fraternus men. I want to focus in on just a couple of points. Let’s start with St. Peter. Notice how he declares the truth about who Jesus is, in spite of what everyone else was saying. “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He did not base his answer on what his group of friends thought, or the group that he wanted to impress thought, or on what some political group – maybe the one in power – thought. He based his answer on what he knew to be the truth. He did not yield to human respect. May God save us, also, from all temptation to give in to human respect!

Not that Peter had yet reached the heights of virtue. No, we know that he would later have a most serious fall, when he would deny Jesus three times. Peter would give in to human respect and fear. Giving in to those temptations would lead him to deny not just any man, but the one who was going to die for him on the cross to save him – the one whom he had previously proclaimed to be the Son of God! It’s hard to imagine just how bad, how dejected Peter must have felt after he did that; the gospels tell us that he wept bitterly. But, with the help of God’s grace, Peter would later give us another manly example: that of repentance. He started again. Christ forgave him and confirmed him in his original mission.

Jesus stands ready to forgive each one of us also during this Ranch; I and the other priests will offer the sacrament of reconciliation generously. Real men go to confession and start again with God’s help! We can learn from Peter’s high – as in today’s gospel; we can learn from Peter’s low – as in when he denied Christ. And we can be better men for it. But we really do not learn enough from St. Peter if we don’t also take advantage of the Lord’s forgiveness, like he did. There are many confession times on your schedule, and I am sure that I speak for all the priests when I say that we are also available to all who seek us out at other times throughout this Ranch experience. Do not hesitate to ask us: this is what we priests are for.

Every saint is unique, and St. Paul became heroically virtuous and holy in rather different way from St. Peter. We know how Paul had vigorously persecuted the Church. But then God gave him the grace of conversion, and he did a complete 180. While he may have had his bad days after that, from what the Scriptures tell us, he dedicated every bit of his energy for the rest of his life to making Christ known wherever he went. St. Paul saw his life, in fact, as a sacrifice for Christ: that was the language he used in our second reading, when he said that he was “already being poured out like a libation”. He saw this life as a competition and a race to win. And he knew that if he persevered, he would win “the crown of righteousness”.

How is our capacity for self-sacrifice? I’m not talking about short or heroic bursts of generosity, but of the steady laying down of our lives that is the mark of true manhood. We need to put aside our selfishness, our pride. We need to be men for others; men of proven character. What a great example St. Paul is for us in this regard. That image of the race that he used is so helpful for our reflection: the winner of a marathon does not win by sprinting as fast as he can;

no, then he would wear himself out before the first half is even completed. Rather, he wins by pacing himself and persevering. And he continually trains so that he can improve his pace. This is what our training in virtue is about.

In that regard, then, I would like to offer a word of caution: do not let this Ranch be like a sprint. Don't let it get you onto a high that you will quickly fall from after you go back to the familiar surroundings and people of home and work. How many men leave from retreats with the holiest of aspirations and then quickly return to their old ways! May the good Lord save us from such superficiality! We need to leave here not just with good feelings but with good, solid resolutions. Yes, resolutions can be easy to make; but if they are solid, it means that we also have a prudent plan for carrying them out. It means that we have counted the cost, figured out what it will take; and also, if we – with God's help – can do it. That is what men do.

What will the Lord teach you and me during this Fraternus Ranch? That is for us to discover. And we have two great saints to inspire and pray for us as we enter in to what I know will be a great time. Gentlemen: how blessed we are to be Catholic! Do you thank God for your Catholic faith? Ss. Peter and Paul shed their blood for it. They left us a manly example to follow. They help us now with their prayers. They want us to join their number. May we be earnest and steadfast in following where they have gone. Paratum cor meum, Deus. Paratum cor meum. My heart is ready, O God. My heart is ready!