

Sunday 28 June 2026
Saints Peter and Paul

Collect:

Almighty God,
whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified you in their death as in their life:
grant that your Church, inspired by their teaching and example, and made one by your Spirit,
may ever stand firm upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings for this week:

Zechariah 4:1-6a, 10b-14; Psalm 125; Acts 12:1-11; Matthew 16:13-19

Keeping this day to jointly remember these two titans of the early Church is a tradition stretching back to the first century CE. According to Augustine, this was because 'these martyrs realised what they taught: they followed the path of integrity, they confessed the truth, and they died for it.' Both founding apostles received new identities in Christ, and by Christ – he gave each of them their new names, transforming them from Simon and Saul to Peter and Paul.

The fifth vision of Zechariah is often described as obscure and finds little place in our lectionary, however, the angel talking and instructing the prophet resonates with the angel leading Peter out of prison and with Christ talking directly from heaven to Saul on his transition to Paul. The lamp described in Zechariah is not a menorah, but a circular object made of precious metal fed with oil directly from living olive trees. It represents the people of God, who can only be lights to all nations by the direct input of the Spirit of God – the oil flowing from the trees. Peter and Paul might also be described as the two olive branches that draw the Word and Spirit of God into the people of God and thus allow it to be shared with the whole world. Psalm 125 offers a prayer of confidence and trust – contrasting those who faithfully follow God from those who turn away.

Acts 12 describes both persecution and deliverance. The birth of the Church came with much groaning and pain, with the most visible leaders of the community being obvious targets for intimidation. Herod's imprisoning of Peter during Passover, the festival celebrating freedom of God's people, leads, through God's direct intervention, to Peter's own freedom. The message of the Gospel will not be kept down. In Matthew 16 Peter is anointed to his key role as a founder of the Church by Christ, with the understanding that this is a serious business which will, as it did for the prophets of old, mean complete commitment, persecution and vindication.

Lord God, the source of truth and love,
keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
united in prayer and the breaking of bread,
and one in joy and simplicity of heart,
in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings for next week:

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-15; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Fifth Sunday after Trinity