Patronal Festival – 29 June 2025

Message – a work in progress

While preparing today's service sheet, I thought it would be great to have a blessing that echoed the character of Saint Peter. Saint Peter, as the first among the apostles has inspired a lot of prayers but for every prayer I found I also thought, well, from what we know, that is not entirely true of Peter.

We know him through his actions recorded in the gospels, acts, and a little from the epistles. Scholars today doubt that Peter wrote the two epistles attributed him though it is possible that the first letter was an official general letter to the wider church from the church in Rome and it might have been that the ideas are Peter's, while a skilled scribe or assistant wrote the text. The second letter shares so much of its text with the letter of Jude, that commentaries are generally a two for one, comparing and contrasting the two texts, with Jude appearing to be the original text.

If our main source for knowing Peter is his actions in the gospel, we would have to say that he might have been a little annoying. The one always leaping in without necessarily considering whether his words or actions were appropriate. Going from the profession in our gospel reading, *'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God',* to half a dozen verses later Jesus saying to him, *'Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me, for you are setting your mind*

not on divine things but on human things.' At best Peter would seem to be a liability!

In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told that Peter and his brother John were *'uneducated and ordinary men'*. None of this feels like a promising candidate to lead the church. Thankfully, Jesus could see the potential in Saint Peter.

That Peter is not an outstanding candidate for the leadership of the body of Christ makes him the archetypal Christian and God's perfect choice. The whole point of the gospel is that all of us are works in progress. As it was for Peter, Christ sees great potential in each one of us. None of us starts our faith journey as anything like a saint.

All of us are on a journey of transformation, a pilgrim people. No doubt some change had happened for Peter while he and the disciples were with Jesus. But the great transformation came through failure. He thought that he was ready to die with Christ but found that when it came to it, his courage deserted him. He wasn't even able to acknowledge that he was one of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth when asked.

Failure and crises confront us with our fragility, the reality of the values we hold, and our priorities. As the reality that he was forgiven sank in for Peter, he understood more of who he could be and wanted to be. We will shortly here the words of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Words that showed fresh understanding and commitment.

The glimpses we see of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles are not of the liability, nearing farse, that we saw in the gospels. Peter has stepped into the role of leader and first among the apostles. It is through Peter, and John's, prayer and laying on of hands, that the first Samaritan Christians receive the holy spirit. It is through Peter's sharing of the gospel that the first gentiles become Christians.

The Peter we see in the Acts of the Apostles is someone to be reckoned with. Peter faithfully followed God's guidance, which had led him to share the way of Christ with the gentiles. He then had to defend his actions to the Jewish Christians. For him it was simple, God got there first, how could they possibly think it was right to holdback baptism with water for these gentiles when they had already been baptised with the spirit. Peter faithfully sets the church on a new trajectory, one in which all of us are included.

We don't glimpse much of Peter's character beyond his actions. Yet, for others to listen to him, he has to have become an effective communicator. All that listening to Jesus' stories seems to have rubbed off on him as well as his now having a deep certainty of what matters in life.

We only really know Peter through the consequences of his actions. The early church flourished and spread. His actions appears to have been an essential part of that. That can feel a little intimidating if we think about it. Our actions speak louder than our words. Our actions may have ripples for generations to come.

Our actions do not always reflect the love that is in our hearts. Our status as a work in progress can at times be very obvious. And, sometimes, even what is in our hearts is not what we would hope or wish.

In Peter we have the human example of God's compassion and love. Perhaps it was the experience of that compassion and love that made Peter so ready to welcome the Samaritans and gentiles into the church. It was hard won personal knowledge that he was freely and fully forgiven, even though he didn't deserve it.

All of us are invited to experience that same forgiveness. If we examine our lives with honesty, we will recognise that we are not all that we could be, that we a times cause others pain. Peter's is the lived example of God's forgiveness. He was ready to start with new energy and passion. For all of us, it is an ongoing journey as we find passion for the things that really matter. The gift of love shared with other bringing fullness of life.

Glenn is about to publicly express his start on the journey of transformation, a journey that has been going on for some time in his life. I hope that all of us will join in quietly with the responses to the questions I will be asking Glenn, reminding us of the precious gift of fullness of life and perfect forgiveness, that was seen in Peter and hopefully will be seen in each one of us. Amen. Amen. Amen.