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*You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.*

Hebrews 7:17

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am writing this to you on the Feast of the two “princes” of the apostles – St. Peter and St. Paul. While they hold a highly revered position in Christianity, their personal lives were far from princely!

St. Peter was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, probably uneducated but used to hard work. Peter left all his belongings to follow Jesus and was known as the leader of the disciples. Even though his dedication to Christ faltered during the Passion, when he denied knowing Jesus and was absent from the crucifixion, Peter was compelled to bring others to a closer relationship with Christ, although this cause people to distrust him and to even kick him from the synagogue. Peter continued to preach and lead people to Christ until the point of his martyrdom in Rome. How significant that he ran from the cross at the crucifixion of Jesus but asked for the cross at his own death!

On the other hand, we have St. Paul, a highly educated philosopher and learned man of the Torah. His love for Judaism drove him to persecute the followers of Jesus, and, as Saul of Taurus, he was present at the martyrdom of St. Stephen. It was on that fateful ride to Damascus that Saul of Taurus encountered the Risen Christ, was blinded for three days, and was ultimately given sight – both physically and spiritually. Saul of Taurus went from being intensely opposed to the followers of Jesus to becoming St. Paul, the person without whom, according to scholars, you and I would not be Christians! It was through St. Paul’s tireless efforts of traveling over 10,000 miles, proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, ending in Rome from where the gospel would be proclaimed to the world.

Both of these great saints embarked on their missions, suffered greatly during their ministry, and died in Rome – and they, ultimately, gave us the great gift of faith.

As I reflect on the lives of these men, I realize that, while I have a great deal on my own “plate”, I do not have much to complain about. During this time of COVID, my challenges have mostly been inconveniences. There may have been some sacrifices but my sacrifices have been nothing compared to those that St. Peter and St. Paul made for us all. Their lives teach us that it takes a lot of hard work if we want to bear fruit in the vineyard of Christ. The secular world searches for convenience and comfort. The Gospel teaches us that, while convenience may bring comfort, the Word of God brings us eternal joy.

Growing in the Word of God and compelled by the love of Christ, this week we welcome a new priest into our parish. While he is a familiar face to many of you, Fr. Brandon Lopez, like the apostles, has been called by God to follow the Risen Christ. We are blessed to have a priest

who is familiar with our parish community – someone who has celebrated all of his sacraments as a member of the St. Pius V. Although he looks the same, through the eyes of the Church, he is ontologically changed, a transformation that allows him to consecrate the bread and wine at Mass into the body and blood of Christ. This profound grace does not make Fr. Brandon a “superman”. You will witness the humanity of Fr. Brandon in his ministry as a parish priest, just as you witness my own and that of Fr. Juvy. I have been blessed to journey with Fr. Brandon through his growth as a seminarian, to vest him as a transitional deacon, and, finally, together with Fr. Ted, to vest him as a priest. I have made a commitment to him to give him the space he will need to grow as a parish priest. At this time, I am asking you to join me in that same commitment, allowing Fr. Brandon grow in his love of Christ and to serve faithfully as an instrument of God’s divine grace.

As we go forward in Christ, thank you for your prayers, love, and support of Fr. Brandon, Fr. Juvy and me.

Fr. Paw