

Dedication of the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

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St. Agnes Cathedral

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Today we celebrate the Dedication of the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul as well as the Catholic Archaeology that has revealed the presence of the bones of Saint Peter at St. Peter's Basilica and the sarcophagus of Saint Paul in the Basilica of Saint Paul outside the walls.

Pictures of these sacred places are placed on the written on-line version of my homily today. The Dedication of these Basilicas is very much connected to the June 29 Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

Catholic Archaeology in these two Basilicas can offer compelling and motivating insights into how to renew the Church's living of its missionary identity as expressed in the thematic arc of teaching on missiology and evangelization from the Second Vatican Council's *Ad Gentes* (1965) to Pope Francis' *Evangelium Gaudium* (2013).

In the late 1930s, Pope Pius XII commissioned an archaeological dig beneath the Vatican and the cemetery streets of ancient Rome to find the Bones of Saint Peter. The Italian word "Scavi" means excavation and so when we have had the opportunity to do a Scavi tour at the Vatican that leads us at the end to the Bones of St. Peter, we never say the Creed quite the same way again.

Similarly, in 2006, Vatican archaeologists, after conducting four years of analysis, confirmed the presence of a white marble sarcophagus beneath the altar at St. Paul at the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls. There was a traditional sense that Paul's remains were under the main altar at the Basilica and the archaeologists through sophisticated 21st Century technology were able to verify this.

As we consider the pivotal and foundational witness of Saints Peter and Paul, and the physical witness in the historical, spiritual and architectural development and evolution of these two Roman Basilicas, it is amazing that these precious relics of

Peter and Paul were ever lost or forgotten about where they actually were. They needed to be rediscovered through bold new missionary archaeological expeditions.

There is a parallel with the truths of our Catholic faith. Sometimes in the course of history, certain dimensions of Catholic truth are not explicitly rejected but lost or obscured.

Like the bones of St. Peter and the sarcophagus of St. Paul, we need to conduct missionary archaeological expeditions to recover these truths and live them powerfully in the 21st Century.

We have often lost sight of the world changing truth that the Holy Spirit leads the Catholic Church at every moment of history to be the universal sacrament of salvation.

Even in the most challenging times, we remember the words of Our Lord in Matthew 14: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”

We remember the example of St. Paul portrayed in Acts 30: “He received all who came to him, and with complete assurance and without hindrance he proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Today we remember that the tombs and remains of Saints Peter and Paul were somehow lost for centuries. They have been rediscovered through Catholic archaeology and celebrated on this day where we celebrate the Dedication of the Basilicas of Saints Peter and Paul.

We are called to do a doctrinal, spiritual and mission archaeology – an archaeology of the Holy Spirit that helps us to retrieve our belief that the Catholic Church is by its very nature missionary and that you and I through our baptisms are called to be holy instruments of *dramatic missionary growth* on Long Island and throughout the world.



