

Homily based on the readings from June 7, 2025 (Acts 28.16-20, 30-31; John 21.20-25)

As we approach the end of the Easter season, it is fitting that we reach the conclusion of the Acts of the Apostles. The Apostle Paul has finally arrived in Rome, where he is ministering to the local population while living under house arrest. Even though the narrative stops at this point, we know from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy that he was subsequently put in prison – prior to his eventual martyrdom.

If you ever have the good fortune to travel to Rome, you can visit the actual prison where Saint Paul – and, for that matter, Saint Peter – were both incarcerated. Likewise, you can visit both of their tombs – in the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls and in the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican. In fact, if you have been following the coverage of Pope Leo, you may remember that his installation Mass began at the tomb of Saint Peter, and that two days later he made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Saint Paul.

These locations – the tombs of the saints – are more than just a matter of historical curiosity. They serve as a visible reminder, to Christians of all generations, that the stories we hear at Mass not just “cleverly devised myths,” but actual historical events – which happened to *real* people in *real* places. Moreover, they provide us with a tangible connection to the forebears of our faith. We can walk on the same ground they walked, we can touch the same objects they touched, we can *pray* in the same places they prayed.

One of the great blessings of Catholic life is that we do not need to go to Rome to have this type of experience. Any one of us could drive about six hours to Emmitsburg, Maryland, to visit the tomb of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton – the first native-born American to be canonized. If you climb the hillside behind the shrine, you can see the actual rock on which Mother Seton sat while she was teaching catechism. We could drive to Quebec to visit the tomb of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, the Lily of the Mohawks. We could drive to New Haven to visit the tomb of Blessed Michael McGivney, the founder of the Knights of Columbus.

Practically anywhere on the planet, we can see evidence of the elaborate tapestry that has been woven by the countless generations of saints who have come before us.

There is an important point to be made here, beyond just geographical accessibility. Even though Peter and Paul died almost two thousand years ago, we are still living in the same time period that they lived. All of Christian history, from the moment of Pentecost onwards, is one continuous era of salvation – what many people call the *Age of Holy Spirit*. As we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost – tomorrow morning or even later today – we need to remember that *nothing* about the Church has changed since the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles in Jerusalem. There is no separation between Biblical times and modern times, between the original Apostles and the Christians of today. Our beliefs are the same, our sacraments are the same, our mission is the same: to proclaim the Kingdom of God, to teach about the Lord Jesus Christ, and to give our lives as a witness to the Faith.