

**Homily given by Fr Anthony Chantry MHM
at the Celebration of the Eucharist at Herbert House
on the Solemnity of Ss Peter and Paul
and of the Blessing of the Heritage Centre
29th June 2009**

It is said that a building is only as good as its foundation. However grand and imposing a building is on the outside, without a solid foundation, cracks will soon appear, leading to instability and eventual collapse. Well-laid, deep foundations are essential for the purpose of bearing the weight of what is to come in the future.

We believe that Christ is the true foundation of the Church, loyal and dependable, solid and strong. He is the perfect foundation, able to bear the weight, sometimes the burden, of the Church through the ages.

However, a foundation is mostly hidden below ground, hardly visible to the eye: it cries out for something more visible to be built upon it.

Today we celebrate the great architects of the Church, Peter and Paul. They were truly human in their lives, people prepared to struggle with their weakness and acknowledge their limitations, always pointing to Christ as the sure foundation of the mission and ministry.

Paul, former religious extremist, fundamentalist, persecutor of the Church, blinded by the challenging love of the Risen Christ, became the greatest of all missionaries. His central insight is that God is for all, that Christ was not the possession of one group but the salvation of all peoples and nations.

Peter, headstrong and passionate in his desire to follow Christ, was destined from the beginning to lead Christ's disciples. When it really counted, when Christ was in his greatest need, he denied him and fled. Yet he did not fall into death-dealing despair but returned to the Lord, with a deep insight into the power of God's forgiveness.

These two architects have, perhaps, more than any others in our Christian history, given shape and direction to our Church. Two thousand years later they continue to inspire us and it is fitting that we honour them.

Throughout history hundreds and thousands of man and women have added their vision, spirit and gifts to the Church, people like Herbert Vaughan and Mary Francis Ingham.

Both founders had vision, determination, creativity and the courage to respond to the needs of the times and discern the Will of God. Herbert Vaughan started at Holcombe House with one student. Mary Ingham started at Yorkshire Street, Rochdale with two young women. They attracted like motivated people and thus began the stories our mission communities.

It is therefore entirely fitting that on this day of celebrating the lives and influence of Peter and Paul, that we also recognise with pride the history and heritage of our Society.

The beautiful Heritage Centre, hopefully with its strong foundation, will protect and honour the history of our Society as part of the story of Christian mission. It will allow future generations of missionaries to be inspired by the lives of those builders of the Church in times gone by: men and women, many of them real larger-than-life characters, who gave their lives in service of the Church's Mission.

We cannot have a vision of the future without a deep appreciation of the past. The Heritage Centre embraces the past and points to the future. The mission of the Church is far from finished: in many ways it has just begun. This Heritage Centre points to the future and inspires us to be messengers of change in proclaiming the coming of God's Kingdom.

May God the architect of all and Christ our sure foundation bind us together in his Spirit as we continue to build the future of God's loving presence in the world.