

JUNE 6 2025, FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

In our first reading today, we find Paul in Caesarea, in prison.

Jesus had said to His disciples:

“If you want to follow me, pick up your cross every day.  
If you follow me, you will be brought before rulers and governors and kings.”

In this moment, Paul is brought before two of those very predictions: Governor Festus and King Agrippa. Just last week, we saw him in Corinth, brought before Governor Gallio. It seems Paul was constantly in and out of prison—but always for the sake of the Gospel.

This time, Paul is in Caesarea because of a formal charge: he was accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple. We’ll come back to that in a moment.

There were two governors involved in his case. The first was Governor Felix, who held Paul in prison for two long years. Then came Governor Festus. Being governor in Caesarea was not exactly an enviable position. The region was filled with tension, and the governors were constantly dragged into religious disputes—disputes that were not only confusing, but also uninteresting to Roman authorities. They wanted no part in them.

Originally, Paul was accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple. But the charge later shifted: now, he was being arrested for proclaiming that Christ had risen from the dead. This, of course, caused chaos among the people, as we heard recently in the readings.

Now, Paul was no ordinary prisoner—he was a prisoner of some celebrity. He wasn’t kept in a common jail but rather confined in the

palace of the governor. This allowed him to be readily presented for trial if needed. Though still bound in chains, Paul had the freedom to continue evangelizing and to receive visitors—many of whom brought him kosher food.

While Paul had moved beyond strict adherence to Jewish dietary laws, he remained sensitive to his fellow Jewish believers. As he put it, “Some can eat meat, others still need milk.” Out of charity, he conformed to their needs, so as not to be a stumbling block to their faith.

Even in prison, Paul didn’t stop preaching. He spoke to Festus. He spoke to King Agrippa—who famously said, “Paul, are you trying to make me a Christian too?” Paul replied earnestly, “I wish you were like me in every way—except for these chains.”

Like many politicians, when Festus didn’t know what to do with the case, he passed the responsibility to someone else—King Agrippa. Paul, realizing that his case was going nowhere, invoked his right as a Roman citizen:

“I appeal to the Emperor.”

That appeal meant he had to be sent to Rome. So he waited, in limbo, until a ship could transport him to be tried by the Emperor himself.

Turning now to the Gospel: in just two days, we will celebrate Pentecost.

At the Ascension, Jesus told His Apostles,

“Stay in Jerusalem and pray for the Holy Spirit.”

From Ascension Thursday to Pentecost Sunday is nine days—a period that became the foundation for what we now call a novena. And this novena has deep scriptural roots. It’s not about reciting fixed formulas or

thinking God is somehow bound to our words. At its heart, a novena is simply this: being men and women of prayer, waiting with hope, and trusting that something great is going to happen.

And something great did happen on Pentecost—the birth of the Church.

To give the Church a strong foundation, Jesus spoke directly to Peter.

“Do you love me?”

He asked him three times—not to pour salt on the wound of Peter’s triple denial, but to heal him. For true healing, one must acknowledge the wound. Peter did. And once Peter affirmed his love, Jesus reinstated him.

“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.”

As St. Bonaventure once said: “If you do not love deeply, you should not be entrusted with the Church or its believers.”

And Peter loved deeply.

So too must we—deeply, faithfully, prayerfully.

God bless you all.