

MAY 22, 2026 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Jesus said in his Gospel, “You will be persecuted because of me. You will be brought before governors, rulers, and kings.” Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles shows this being fulfilled. Paul is brought before Governor Felix, and now, after two years, he stands before Governor Festus, who has as his guest King Agrippa and his sister Berenice.

Paul was first brought before them because he had brought Gentiles into Jerusalem, and when he brought them into the temple, a riot was about to break out. The Roman guards and soldiers intervened and arrested him. Now, when Paul is brought before the king and Governor Festus, the accusations change. What began as a political accusation becomes a religious one, centered on Jesus, his passion, his death, and his resurrection. Festus admits that this is beyond him. He does not understand what they are talking about.

Caesarea was not a desirable post for governors; they preferred assignments in more prestigious regions. When Felix could not handle the case, he left it unresolved, as often happens, and passed it on to his successor. So Paul remains in prison for two years. One can imagine he is growing weary, longing to go out and proclaim the Good News. Therefore, he appeals to the emperor.

Festus then presents Paul before King Agrippa, explaining that he would have dismissed the case, but since Paul has appealed to the emperor, he must be kept in custody until he can be sent to Rome. Paul, however, is not an ordinary prisoner. As a Roman citizen, he is treated differently and kept separately. Though in chains, he is still able to move about and continue his mission. He keeps proclaiming: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

So compelling is his witness that King Agrippa asks, “Paul, are you trying to convert me?” And Paul replies, “Yes, I want you to be just like me, except for these chains.”

In a few days, we will celebrate Pentecost. Having reflected on Paul, we now turn to Peter in the Gospel. Peter had denied Jesus three times in the courtyard of Caiaphas. Now he stands before another fire, this time on the shores of Galilee. Jesus prepares breakfast for the disciples, and there, he asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?”

Jesus is not reopening wounds but healing them. Peter had denied him three times; now he is given the chance to affirm his love three times. Jesus confirms that Peter loves him deeply. He recalls the earlier moment at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter proclaimed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and Jesus declared, “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church.”

Now, after his denial and renewed love, Peter is ready. As we approach Pentecost, we remember that after the Ascension, Jesus told the apostles to remain in Jerusalem. Nine days later, the Holy Spirit came. This became the first novena of prayer in the Church, rooted in Scripture.

Jesus entrusts his Church to Peter, not simply because he loves, but because he loves deeply. As Saint Bonaventure reminds us, Christ does not hand over his Church to just anyone who loves, but to one whose love is deep and tested.

May we, too, ask for that same grace—to remain faithful in trials, to witness boldly like Paul, and to love Christ deeply like Peter. God bless you all.