

29 June – Peter and Paul, Apostles A – B – C

First reading Acts 12:1-11

King Herod started persecuting certain members of the Church. He beheaded James the brother of John, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews he decided to arrest Peter as well. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread, and he put Peter in prison, assigning four squads of four soldiers each to guard him in turns. Herod meant to try Peter in public after the end of Passover week.

All the time Peter was under guard the Church prayed to God for him unremittingly.

On the night before Herod was to try him, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with double chains, while guards kept watch at the main entrance to the prison. Then suddenly the angel of the Lord stood there, and the cell was filled with light. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him. "Get up!" he said "Hurry!" – and the chains fell from his hands. The angel then said, "Put on your belt and sandals." After he had done this, the angel next said, "Wrap your cloak round you and follow me." Peter followed him but had no idea that what the angel did was all happening in reality; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed through two guard posts one after the other, and reached the iron gate leading to the city. This opened of its own accord; they went through it and had walked the whole length of one street when suddenly the angel left him. It was only then that Peter came to himself. "Now I know it is all true," he said. "The Lord really did send his angel and has saved me from Herod and from all that the Jewish people were so certain would happen to me."

Second reading 2 Timothy 4:6-8.17-18

As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his Appearing. But the Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the whole message might be proclaimed for all the pagans to hear; and so I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Then Simon Peter spoke up. "You are the Christ," he said "the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church.

And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven."

Meditation

On this day the Church of Rome celebrates its apostolic foundation. The earliest liturgical texts maintain the unity of this solemnity. The presence of separate basilicas dedicated to the cult of Peter and Paul eventually gave rise to two successive days of celebration. The original unity of this solemnity has been restored in the revision of the Roman calendar. The fixing of this date for the celebration of their martyrdom goes back to the *Depositio Martyrum* (258).

Peter and Paul are the two pillars of the Church whom ancient liturgy and iconography never separate. The confession of faith is the particular trait which earns Simon the surname Peter and the mission to guide and to strengthen his brothers and sisters and thus to build the Church.

It seems strange that God entrusted such a demanding task to this rough, unpolished man, who had no exceptional gifts, who was at times so weak. How much wiser it would have seemed to assign this ministry to Paul! Although a latecomer to Christianity, he appears to have been so much better prepared by birth and by his brilliant formation at the hands of well-known teachers.

Always alert, animated by an extraordinary energy and by an exclusive passion for the One whom he had at first persecuted in this Church, he becomes the instrument chosen to reveal the gospel of salvation to the Gentiles. Paul, whom no trial could separate from the love of Christ, will never deny him.

Each of them has a place in the development of the faith: Peter, the guide, through his role of direction and confirmation; Paul, the sower, through his energy and gift for adaptation. Their meetings at Jerusalem and at Antioch show their common inspiration as well as their confrontations. It is at Rome, where they both receive the crown of martyrdom, that they are ultimately united in that charity which they always sought to promote. The dialogue between institution (Peter) and charism (Paul) is not always peaceful, but it alone moves history forward. For the Church of Peter and Paul to escape sclerosis, it must join movement to direction, the overall good of the institution to the particular challenge of charism.