

Solemnity of Ss. Peter and Paul Day Mass A/2014

All the readings of this Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul focus on the teachings and the work of those important personalities who have contributed to the growth of the church and the Spreading of the Gospel to the nations. They invite us to imitate those heroes of our faith by spreading the good news of Jesus.

The first reading describes a miraculous liberation that happened to Peter when he was in prison. It shows how, in spite of the presence of all the soldiers who guarded him, God delivered him through the sending of his angel. It shows also that, while Peter was in jail, the whole Church was united with him in prayer until the day God intervened to set him free.

What is behind this text is the idea that whatever might be the suffering of his people, God will intervene in order to put an end to it. Another idea is the truth that prayer is a powerful tool that can touch the heart of God and obtain his favor. The last idea is related to the truth that God in his providence has always some surprises for us, because he can intervene in our life when we expect the least.

This text allows us to understand today's Gospel as it describes the confession of Peter who recognizes Jesus as Christ and the Son of God. First of all, the Gospel starts with the question of Jesus to his disciples about what people say about him. Then, it gives a variety of responses summarizing people's opinion about what they think about Jesus.

The Gospel describes also the way Jesus turned to his disciples with the same question and how Peter came to recognize him as Christ, the Son of God. Finally, the Gospel ends with Jesus declaring Peter as the head of the Church by giving him the symbolic power of the key and by making him the rock on which the Church is built.

What do we learn from those readings? Today, I want to talk about the heroism of faith. Let me start this way. Each nation on earth has its heroes and its champions. Heroes and champions are admired and celebrated for their bravery and their virtue. The excellence of their commitment and the integrity of their life make them the models to imitate for younger generations and the symbols to admire for older generations.

It is not only nations that have champions, but the Church too has its heroes. The two apostles we celebrate today, namely Peter and Paul, are the heroes of the Church. They have played a big role in the life of the Church and shaped its structure by their teaching and work. They have contributed to the advancement of the kingdom of God, the growth of the Church and the reception of eternal salvation.

Both were animated with courage, abnegation and the sense of the mission received from Jesus. In the course of their journey, they were guided by God through the power of his Holy Spirit to brave dangers and accept sufferings for God's sake. They gave the best of themselves, each according to his gifts and talents, for the good of the Church

In spite of their differences in skills and abilities, they were all guided by a single desire, namely to serve Christ's Church by serving their brothers and sisters for whom he gave his life on the cross.

By bringing Peter and Paul, in one single celebration, the Church wants to remind us that the Church is one, but has different ministries and charismas. Each minister has received his own vocation and gifts, but they all work for the same cause, which is the kingdom of God. That is how St Paul gave his life for the good news of Jesus in the gentile lands, as witness his different letters, while St Peter dedicated his for the Jews, his brothers. For that reason, the workers in the field of the Lord complete each other.

This is true today as it was in the past. We are all called to work together as one people and for the glory of Jesus, in spite of our differences. Our differences, indeed, should not be used to compete or to oppose each other, but as a way of enriching the Church with our gifts. When we forget such a truth, we destroy rather than build the Church.

In that perspective, it is clear that the heroism of faith does not seek its own glory because someone has talents, but is, above all, at the service of the kingdom of God.

At the heart of the heroism of faith is Jesus and not the individual, so talented he might be. An individual is just an instrument that God uses for his glory. In that sense, the person of Jesus meant a lot to Paul and Peter. When they went preaching, they always put him and his glory first. They never looked for their own glory. That is why in the first reading, Peter accepted the suffering of jail for the sake of Jesus because he was convinced of the righteousness of the cause he was defending.

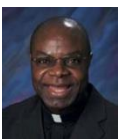
The means of the heroism of faith is witness and conviction of life. Without witness, faith becomes a mere slogan and the minister becomes a mere functionary fulfilling a human duty which is, at times, easy and, at other times, heavy.

That is why before leaving the responsibility of the Church to Peter, Jesus wanted, first, that he give a strong witness and prove that he really knew who he was dealing with. And Peter, on behalf of the twelve, declared without hesitation that he was the Christ, the Son of the living God.

So assured by Peter's confession, Jesus can give him authority over the Church. That authority is expressed in these words: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven".

There are two things we have to understand here. First, the church lives with a promise and guarantee of God's assistance until the end of time. Second, the symbolism of keys means that Peter has the trust of Jesus. In fact, we give the keys of our home when we go on vacation only to trusted friends so that they look after it. That is what Jesus has done. That responsibility is continued today by the Pope. That is why we have to pray today for our Pope Francis so that God bless his ministry and leadership for the good of the whole Church. God bless you all!

Acts 12: 1-11; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18; Matthew 16: 13-19



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