

## REFLECTION FOR 29 JUNE, SOLEMNITY OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

On this day, 29 June, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, two fundamental pillars of our Church. They came to Jesus by different paths. Peter, the fisherman, heard Jesus' call on the shores of the Sea of Galilee; Paul, the Jewish rabbi, met Jesus on the road to Damascus. When they encountered Jesus, both were seduced by Him, loving Him until the end, even giving their lives for Him (both were killed in Rome during the persecution ordered by Emperor Nero). Saint Peter and Saint Paul, each in his own way, are therefore two great references for Christians of all ages. Today's readings challenge us to follow their example of fidelity to Jesus and to the Gospel.

The first reading shows how Jesus' disciples were persecuted from the beginning of their mission. James is killed by Herod and Peter is thrown into prison because Herod saw that the people, particularly the Jewish authorities, were pleased with this. Once again, political power will stop at nothing to 'please', even if it means imprisoning, torturing and killing innocent people. These same powers had already put Jesus to death, and throughout the ages his disciples would continue to be victims of the same; the proclamation of the Good News to the poor will always be seen as a danger to the powers that be.

However, Jesus Christ himself had prepared his disciples for this reality, asking them not to be afraid, because he would be with them until the end of time. And today's reading seeks to show us how true this is. During the night, Peter is freed by the angel of the Lord, showing that God does not abandon his faithful. Peter's marvellous liberation from prison, where he was locked up, shows God's concern for his Church and for the disciples who bear witness to the Good News of salvation in the world.

The reading also highlights the witness of the community, which does not react violently to James' death and Peter's imprisonment, but prays. Prayer is the great weapon of the Christian community.

The second reading is presented as Paul's 'testament'. In a kind of 'final assessment' of the apostle's life, the author of this text recalls Paul's generous response to Jesus' call and his total commitment to the Gospel. It is a moving and challenging text, which invites disciples of all ages to follow the Christian path with enthusiasm, dedication and courage, following the example of Paul and knowing that God will never abandon us on our journey. As Paul affirms, let us place our hope in him because with Jesus we will never be disappointed,

The Gospel today invites disciples to adhere to Jesus and to see him as 'the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' From this adherence the Church is born: the community of Jesus' disciples, gathered and organised around Peter, whose mission is to bear witness to the offer of salvation that Jesus came to bring.

Peter is the 'rock' that Jesus chose to be the foundation of his Church. He is the one who has the mission of confirming his brothers and sisters in the faith, interpreting the words of Jesus, adapting the teachings of Jesus to the challenges of the world, and welcoming into the community all those who adhere to the proposal of salvation that Jesus offers. It is around Peter that the Christian community gathers.

As Saint Ambrose said: where Peter is, there is the Church. That is why the Catholic Church lives her faith with Peter, with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. In communion with Christ and with one another, with 'Peter,' the Pope, as her 'rock,' the Church continues today to proclaim the Good News to the poor and to bring Jesus' message of salvation to the world.

Let us live our faith with Paul as an evangelising missionary Church, and united with Peter so that we may be one people with Christ, as the Lord asked.

AMEN