

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

June 29-30, 2013 (12:00 Noon only)

Readings: Acts 12: 1-11; 2 Tim. 4: 6-8, 17-18; Matt. 16: 13-19

How big is the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, you may ask?

Historically, the high esteem given to this solemnity in Rome is shown by the fact that the pope celebrated it twice: first in St Peter's Basilica and then at St Paul Outside the Walls. The 4 mile distance between the basilicas was difficult in the heat, and so eventually St. Gregory the Great generously allowed people the option of choosing one or the other. Both saints were honored each time.

It is a feast celebrated on the same day in East and West, and presents opportunities for ecumenical exchanges between Catholics and those from the Orthodox Church. It is our hope in prayer that one day the Orthodox Church will be reunited in full Communion with Rome. The Catechism characterizes our communion with the Orthodox as “profound,” even if not full.

Yesterday, our Holy Father bestowed the pallium to 35 new residential Archbishops from all over the world on Sunday. This is a symbol of their connection with the See of Peter and, as the woolen garment worn around their necks highlights their role as shepherds. Representatives from the Orthodox Church in Constantinople were present, as was also as a Lutheran boys' Choir that joined the Sistine Choir. It was a great celebration.

Saint Augustine wrote about this ancient feast, observed in his day:

There is one day for the passion of two apostles. But these two also were as one; although they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, Paul followed. We are celebrating a feast day, consecrated for us by the blood of the apostles. Let us love their faith, their lives, their labors, their sufferings, their confession of faith, their preaching. (*Sermo 295, 1-2, 4, 7-8; PL 38, 1348-1352*)

St. Peter stood for the Church's universality and unity, when he was presented the keys, symbolic of his authority, an authority given by Jesus Christ, a primacy that was to be lived in love. This was no power grab- if anything, it was a ticket to suffering and sacrifice. To him was entrusted what has in fact been entrusted to each of us. We have a role to play in the preservation of the faith according to our state in life; each of us can be a missionary, like Peter and Paul.

When I think of St. Paul, I cannot help but think about his profound conversion, even though he accomplished so much more in his life afterwards. But that is what stands out! I have found it fruitful to meditate upon classic paintings, even if most of the time I am meditating on these masterpieces with the aid of a coffee table book: I think of Rembrandt's Saint Paul at his Writing-Desk (1629-1630) or Caravaggio's famous "The Conversion of Saint Paul" or "Crucifixion of St. Peter" (1600); Raphael's Saint Paul Preaching in Athens (1515), with the many and varied reactions of the listeners.

They are amazing works, as we gaze on the looks on their faces, especially that of Saul at the time of his conversion. When we are captured by the love of Christ, we change. We will never be the same again, just as when we are infused with sanctifying Grace at Baptism, our souls are changed forever.

The Church is apostolic because She was founded on the apostles, because She continues to keep and hand on the Sacred Deposit of Faith, and because She continues to be taught, sanctified and guided by the apostles through their successors in pastoral office, the Bishops. Today is a day of rejoicing, but also a day of challenge, for we must each do our part to keep pure and intact the living Faith of the Church. In so doing, we most assuredly honor the great Sts. Peter and Paul.

On this one of our patronal feast days, I invite you to venerate the stone from the tomb of St. Paul, placed near the pulpit, and partake of the bond of spiritual affinity that we have with the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls.

Those participating in Mass here today can obtain a Plenary Indulgence under the usual conditions:

- freedom from all attachment to sin, including venial sin
- sacramental confession
- reception of Holy Communion
- prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father