

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

June 29-30, 2019

Readings: Vigil (Acts 3:1-10; Gal. 1:11-20; John 21:15-29)

Mass During the Day (Acts 12: 1-11; 2 Tim. 4: 6-8, 17-18; Matt. 16: 13-19)

Rome likes things in pairs! If you stopped for a cappuccino, as I did many times, you also bought a tasty cornetto. Cacio e pepe, a pasta dish with “cheese and pepper” is a local favorite. According to legend, the city was founded in 753 B.C. by Romulus and Remus. Today, we turn to Rome, but to Christian Rome, where the Catholic faith is commemorated at its foundation on this feast day of Sts. Peter and Paul. It is likely that many Romans saw in these two men a new and improved Romulus and Remus.

If Peter was the first among the Apostles because of his authority, Paul was equally first among the Apostles because of his apostolic labor. The first to mention the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome was Pope St. Clement (88-97A.D.) in his Letter to the Corinthians. The second century writer, Tertullian, names Rome as the place “where Peter suffered like his Lord,” (meaning crucifixion), and where “Paul was crowned with John's death,” a reference to the beheading of John the Baptist.¹

As early as 258 A.D., there is evidence² of a tradition of celebrating the solemnities both of Saint Peter and Saint Paul “three days before the Calends of July,” that is, June 29; Peter at the catacombs of S. Sebastiano and Paul on the Via Ostia. Together, the two saints are the founders of the See of Rome, through their preaching, ministry and martyrdom there.

Ancient prayers typically invoke the two together., speaking of the apostles in the plural. But some differences remain. Saint Paul is called the “last of the apostles” since he was the last to be called to the faith and Saint Peter called “the first,” due to his primacy.

¹ Tertullian, *On the Prescription*, 36. This is the first mention of Peter's crucifixion in historical documents.

² *Depositio martyrum*, 29 June, we read: *III kal. Iul. Petri in Catacumbas et Pauli Ostense Tusco et Basso cons.* “In the month of June, three days before the Kalends of July: of Peter in catacumbas and of Paul on the Ostiensis, in the consulship of Tuscus and Bassus.” Even the primitive graffiti of regular people of Rome teaches us something- either Peter and Paul appear together, with Christ or without him; or else Peter is represented alone, at various moments in his life.

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

“Both apostles share the same feast day, for these two were one; and even though they suffered on different days, they were as one. Peter went first, and Paul followed. And so we celebrate this day made holy for us by the apostles' blood. Let us embrace what they believed, their life, their labors, their sufferings, their preaching, and their confession of faith.”³

I saw a book that claimed that President Ronald Reagan kept a plaque on his desk in the Oval Office that read: “There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go if he doesn't mind who gets the credit.” Peter or Paul? Who gets the credit for the faith in Rome? Does it matter? Who gets the credit for the spreading of the faith today? Does it matter? What is important is that the faith is spread.

In the Vigil Mass, we hear[d] from Galatians 1:18, where Paul notes: “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas and remained with him for fifteen days.” We do not know how many times Peter and Paul actually met- their first meeting would have been a full three years after Paul was converted. Think about that for a moment.

Our greatest figures in the foundation of the Church would have had far less contact than we do with our family members; they spread out, they dispersed to faraway lands to form new communities, all the while maintaining and reserving communion among them. One tradition says that, in addition to his missionary journeys in Acts, Saint Paul also went to Spain.

These men were not Lone Rangers; they were part of an apostolic band that remained united by the bonds of faith and an undying conviction in the power of the Gospel message of Jesus, a saving message of love and truth. They witnessed to these truths for the rest of their lives.

³ *Sermo 295, 1-2, 4, 7-8; PL 38, 1348-1352*

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. They need our prayers more than ever, so that they may remain rooted in the truth of the faith and profess it fearlessly

Today is a day of rejoicing, but also a day of challenge, for we much 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.