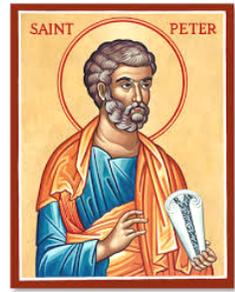


Thursday 29th June 2017

Peter Apostle

Ember Day **Red**



Collect

Almighty God, whose blessed apostles Peter and Paul glorified you in their death as in their life: grant that your Church, inspired by their teaching and example, and made one by your Spirit, may ever stand firm upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Acts 12:1-11 English Standard Version (ESV)

James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

12¹ About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. ² He killed James the brother of John with the sword, ³ and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. ⁵ So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Peter Is Rescued

⁶ Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. ⁷ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. ⁸ And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." ⁹ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate

leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. ¹¹ When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.”

COMMENT: In this chapter a new wave of persecution, instigated by King Herod, broke out against the Church, and especially against its leaders (verse 1). Herod Agrippa of this chapter was a direct descendant of the Maccabees, through his mother Mariamne. He had been educated at Rome, but he deliberately cultivated the good graces of the Jewish people by meticulously keeping the Law and all Jewish observances. For these reasons he was popular with the people; and it was no doubt in order to achieve further popularity with the orthodox Jews that he decided to attack the Christian Church and its leaders. Herod had arrested James and Peter, executing James, and keeping Peter in a dungeon (verses 2-4). Sixteen soldiers, four for each watch, were stationed to keep guard over Peter. Two soldiers were chained to him and two watched the doors. Evidently the authorities remembered the last time Peter had been arrested, and how he had mysteriously escaped from jail, and they were not about to let that happen again. In the meantime the church was praying, and in answer to their prayers (verse 5) God supernaturally awakened Peter from a sound sleep (verse 6). He caused the chains to fall from his wrists, kept the guards asleep, and opened the iron gates (verses 7-11).

Matthew 16:13-19 English Standard Version (ESV)

Peter Confesses Jesus as the Christ

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock^[a] I will build my church, and the gates of hell^[b] shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed^[c] in heaven.”

Footnotes: a. The Greek words for *Peter* and *rock* sound similar. b. Greek *the gates of Hades*. c. or *shall have been bound... shall have been loosed*.

COMMENT: Many dogmatic and ecclesiastical issues surface in the analysis of this reading. Not the least of these are the primacy of Peter and hence of the claim to the papacy by the bishop of Rome. Another is the nature of the authority ostensibly given by Christ to the Apostles. We often view Peter through the prism of his betrayal. However he was the leader of the Apostolic band and had realised the significance of Jesus before the rest of the disciples. A curious anomaly arises as soon as we realise the location of this incident. Caesarea Philippi lies in the foothills of Mount Lebanon, some 2000 feet above sea level. This location has three significant religious, geographical and political aspects: It has been an ancient holy place honouring the pagan god Pan. It was of one of three sources of the Jordan River which fed its waters about 25 turbulent miles southward into the Sea (actually lake) of Galilee some 700 feet below sea level. Herod Philip, a contemporary of Jesus as the tetrarch (a petty king) of Trachonitis and other provinces east of the Jordan, built his summer residence here after his father's death in 4 BC. Jesus would have been well aware of all this. Did he lead his disciples to this site because he wanted them to recognise him in a setting totally different from the familiar shores of the Sea of Galilee? Did he want them to see him as the Messiah of the whole world, not just of the Jews? The response of the disciples to his penetrating questions casts the importance of the event into sharp relief. At first they linked him with Israel's prophetic history. Undoubtedly the general populace saw him as one of the prophets, as did they. The tradition held that Elijah would return to announce the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist fitted that role and had suffered death by execution at the order of Herod Antipas, half-brother of Philip.

Psalm 125 *Qui confidunt* Grail Psalter

℟ The Lord surrounds his people.

¹ Those who put their trust in the Lord
are like Mount Zion, that cannot be shaken,
that stands for ever. ℟

² Jerusalem! The mountains surround her,
so the Lord surrounds his people
both now and for ever. ℟

³ For the sceptre of the wicked shall not rest
over the land of the just
for fear that the hands of the just
should turn to evil. ℟

⁴ Do good, Lord, to those who are good,
to the upright of heart;
⁵ but the crooked and those who do evil,
drive them away!
On Israel, peace!

R **The Lord surrounds his people.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This is a national Psalm of confidence and trust in God, who will keep evil away from God's people (the land of the just) – the Psalm ends with a prayer. God's blessings should not be taken for granted, but should always lead us to prayer.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks that your glory is revealed in St Peter, St Paul and all the saints. In their lives you have given us an example of faithfulness to Christ. In their holiness we find encouragement and hope. In our communion with them we share the unity of your kingdom.

Post Communion

Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

God give you grace to follow his saints in faith and hope and love; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**