

Thursday 29th June 2017

Peter and Paul Apostles

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**

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 English Standard Version (ESV)

Finishing the race

4 ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

The Lord is my defence

¹⁶At my first defence no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

COMMENT: The tradition remains that Paul died during Nero's persecution of the mid-AD 60s. As a Roman citizen he would have been beheaded rather than crucified, as tradition reported concerning Peter's death about the same time. There can be little doubt that this

passage comes from someone who knew exactly what had happened to Paul. The passage is in the style of the hero in the Greco-Roman literary culture. That motif goes back to Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. The difference in the New Testament portrayal of the hero motif, however, lay in the way the story ends. Whereas in the Greco-Roman stories, the athletic hero was crowned with laurel leaves, the Christian hero, eschewing worldly honours, died not only bravely but willingly because he knew that his reward lay beyond an ignominious death. 2 Timothy 4:8 says as much: "From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award me on that day." The phrases in verses 16-18 may have been inspired by Psalm 22. According to the gospels, this psalm was on the mind of Jesus too when he hung upon the cross. As Paul himself faced death, he was comforted and encouraged with the same psalm as his Lord in the similar circumstances.

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.**