

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles - Mass during the Day

Reading I

Acts 12:1-11

In those days, King Herod laid hands upon some members of the Church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also.

–It was the feast of Unleavened Bread.–

He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the Church was fervently being made to God on his behalf.

On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter, secured by double chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while outside the door guards kept watch on the prison. Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, “Get up quickly.” The chains fell from his wrists. The angel said to him, “Put on your belt and your sandals.” He did so. Then he said to him, “Put on your cloak and follow me.” So he followed him out, not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter recovered his senses and said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting.”

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (5) **The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.**

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.

Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. **The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.**

Glorify the LORD with me,
let us together extol his name.

I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

R. **The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.**

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,
and your faces may not blush with shame.

When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.

R. **The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.**

The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Taste and see how good the LORD is;
blessed the man who takes refuge in him.

R. **The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him.**

Reading II

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

I, Paul, am already being poured out like a libation,
and the time of my departure is at hand.

I have competed well; I have finished the race;
I have kept the faith.

From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me,
which the Lord, the just judge,
will award to me on that day, and not only to me,
but to all who have longed for his appearance.

The Lord stood by me and gave me strength,
so that through me the proclamation might be completed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.

And I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat
and will bring me safe to his heavenly Kingdom.

To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Alleluia

Matthew 16:18

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church,
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Gospel

Matthew 16:13-19

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi
he asked his disciples,

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah,
still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter said in reply,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

And so I say to you, you are Peter,

and upon this rock I will build my Church,

and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven.

Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;

and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Exegesis

Acts 12:1-11

In our pericope from *Acts*, the Church, especially its leadership, is facing renewed persecution. The first wave of persecution, in which Saul was involved, drove the followers of Christ out of Jerusalem into the surrounding regions. That initial persecution led to the martyrdom of Stephen. “And Saul consented to his death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the Church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria.” (Acts 8: 1).

Now King Herod Agrippa I (41-44), Herod the Great’s grandson, is leading a second wave of persecution. This time the focus of the persecution is directed more toward the leadership of the Church. Herod had James put to death. James was the son of Zebedee and one of the twelve. Now Herod has Peter imprisoned.

It is the time of Unleavened Bread and Passover, a seven-day feast. Thousands of Jews would have attended the festivities in Jerusalem. The setting would have reminded the followers of Jesus, of His passion and death a few years prior. The promise of Jesus of persecutions to come would also have been fresh in their minds. Now those persecutions are close and personal.

This is the third imprisonment of Peter. (See Acts 4:3 and 5:18). The deliverance of Peter during the time of Passover also reminds us of the delivery of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. “On that same day the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt.” (Ex 12: 51). “Therefore, I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land...” (Ex 3: 8).

But prayer by the Church was fervently being made to God on his behalf. We witness in this passage the miraculous power of God overcoming the natural rules of nature. We also must acknowledge the power of intercessory prayer. Luke mentions the prayer of the Church for a reason, i.e., to demonstrate the power of prayer.

God sends His messenger. This is the second time that Peter is rescued by an angel of God: “They arrested the apostles and put them in prison. But that night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out...” (Acts 5: 19). The intervention of the angel also evokes memory of the events of the Exodus experience: “The angel of God, who had been leading Israel’s camp, now moved and went around behind them.” (Ex 14: 19). There are numerous examples of angels interceding for, guiding, and delivering people. (See for examples: Tob 12:15; Job 33:23-24; Ps 34:7; 91:11; Heb 1:14)

The angel said to him, “Put on your belt and your sandals.” He did so. Then he said to him, “Put on your cloak and follow me.” Every detail of Sacred Scripture matters. The fact that Luke chooses to include this level of detail should, in fact, cause us to explore its purpose. Once more it evokes memory of the Exodus experience. There, too, the angel of God offers a similar command relative to attire: “This is how you are to eat it: with your loins girt, sandals on our feet and your staff in hand, you shall eat like those who are in flight.” (Ex 12: 11).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Psalm 34 consists of thirty-four verses. In the *New American Bible*, the psalm is titled *Thanksgiving to God Who Delivers the Just*. Psalm 34 is just one of many Psalms devoted to giving thanks and praise to God. Our psalm today gives joyful thanks and praise to God for His saving hand. The final verse sums up the entire psalm: “The Lord redeems loyal servants; no one is condemned whose refuge is the Lord. (Ps 34: 23).

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall ever be in my mouth. The Hebrew word translated as *bless* is *brk* (pronounced bay-ruck). It can also mean *praise* or *kneel before* as in an act of worship. Certainly, God has no need of our blessing. The Hebrew word for *Lord* in this verse is *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word for *praise* here is *tehillah*. *Tehillah* is often translated as *praise*, *glory*, or *song of glory and praise*. Most often it refers to a song of praise. *In my mouth* suggests an outward verbal act of praise as in song or verbal praise.

Let my soul glory in the LORD; the lowly will hear me and be glad. The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nepes*. *Nepes* describes the innermost person, the depth of one’s being. It is in the Lord, Yahweh, that we should glory. The Prophet Jeremaih describes this true glory: “Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man glory in his strength, not the rich man glory in his riches; but rather, let him who glories, glory in this, that in his prudence he knows Me.” (Jer 9: 22-23).

I sought the LORD, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears. The Hebrew word for *fear* in this passage is *magorah*. *Magorah* describes a craven fear as being terrified. This word contrasts the word *yaray* that is translated as *fear* typically when referring to our response to God. *Yaray* describes more of a sense of awe and reverence.

Look to Him that you may be radiant with joy. This again is a call to an outward expression of joy and gratitude. It is important that we taste and see, experience the goodness of God so that others may then see and experience God’s goodness shining in our faces. Not only is God’s goodness to be heard in our songs of praise, but God’s goodness is to be seen in our faces and actions.

When the poor one called out, the LORD heard, and from all his distress He saved him. Our God hears our pleas and seeks to save and deliver us from all distress. For this we respond with gratitude and praise.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them. The Hebrew word translated as *angel* is *malak*. It literally means *messenger*. The angel is a messenger from Yahweh. *Malak* appears in Genesis Chapter 32 and in 2 Kings 6:17 also referring to a messenger of Yahweh. The underlying Hebrew word for *Lord* in this verse is again *Yahweh*. The Hebrew word for *fear* is *yaray*. (See discussion above).

Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Verse 9a is often used as a response because it is very experiential. It speaks of experiencing the goodness of God in what we can see and taste. The Hebrew word for *taste* is *tahum*. It means to savor and perceive with the senses. The Hebrew word for *goodness* is *tob*. It carries connotations of beauty, pleasing to experience, and wellness.

The angel of the Lord will rescue those who fear him. Again, the word for *fear* is *yaray*.

Exegesis (Continued)

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

I, Paul, am already being poured out like a libation. The reference to being poured out like a libation is to the ritual of pouring wine on the ground before the altar of sacrifice. “Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two yearling lambs as the sacrifice established for each day; one lamb in the morning and the other at the evening twilight. With the first lamb there shall be an ephah of fine flour mixed with a fourth of a hin of oil of crushed olives and, as its libation, a fourth of a hin of wine.” (Ex 29: 38-40). (See also Num 28:7). St. Paul views martyrdom as an act of sacrifice to God. “My boast for the day of Christ may be that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. But even as I am poured out like a libation upon the sacrificial service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with all of you.” (Phil 2: 17).

And the time of my departure is at hand. Paul is referring to his death, which he feels is immanent. He also shares his desire to die for the Lord. “For me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit. (Phil 1: 21-24). Paul was condemned during the persecution of Nero. He was beheaded outside of Rome along the Ostian Way.

I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Paul uses this imagery of the race as well in *First Corinthians*: “Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one.” (1 Cor 9: 24-25).

The Lord stood by me and gave me strength. 2 Timothy was written between the first and the second trial of St. Paul. St. Paul is feeling abandoned, “Luke is the only one with me.” (2 Tim 4:11). “At my first defense no one appeared on my behalf, but everyone deserted me.” (2 Tim 4: 16). Although feeling abandoned by his peers and his flock, he knows that the Lord is with him to give him strength.

The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly Kingdom. Paul is certain of his immanent death and is passing the torch to Timothy and future Church leaders, like us.

Exegesis (Continued)

Matthew 16:13-19

Jesus and His disciples cross the Sea of Galilee to the east side. They then traveled north into Gentile territory to the city of Caesarea Philippi located on the far north boundaries of Palestine. It was once called Panion (or Panias) named after the Greco-Roman god Pan. Philip, the son of Herod the Great, became tetrarch of the region in 4 B.C. and reigned until 33 A.D. Early in his tenure he rebuilt the city that became his home. He renamed the city Caesarea Philippi after Caesar Augustus and himself. The city was located on the southern slope of Mount Hermon. From this granite mountain side flows a stream that provided water for the community and served as one of the main tributaries providing a major source flowing into the Jordan River. This setting provides a beautiful image of water flowing from the rock in the desert and water flowing from the side of Christ, the Rock of our salvation.

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” The title *Son of Man* appears many times in Sacred Scripture. It is a title that Jesus uses to refer to Himself. The title *Son of Man* in Hebrew is *ben adam*, in Aramaic is *bar enas*, and in Greek is *ho huios tou anthropou*. The Prophet Daniel reports a vision in which the Son of Man was revealed to him: “One like a son of man, coming on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, he received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.” (Dan 7: 13-14). John would later have a vision of the end times and one like a Son of Man, the Risen Lord, harvesting the world: “Then I looked and there was a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud one who looked like a son of man, with a gold crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand... So, the one who was sitting on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.” (Rev 14: 14, 16).

Matthew reveals Jesus as the Christ (*Christos*), Messiah/Christ three times in the first chapter of his Gospel beginning with verse one: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ (*Christos*), the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Mt 1: 1). As Matthew brings the genealogy to a close, he writes: “Of her (Mary) was born Jesus who is called the Christ (*Christos*).” (Mt 1: 16). Then announcing the birth of Jesus Matthew again uses the title: “Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ (*Christos*) came about. (Mt 1: 18).

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” There was significant misunderstanding as to the anticipated role of the Messiah. Peter seems to lack understanding as he tries to dissuade Jesus from His Passion. In his profession here, he seems to get it right. The expression *living God* appears elsewhere in Sacred Scripture, e.g., “My being thirsts for God, the living God.” (Ps 42: 3).

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. St. Paul reveals a similar experience: “God, who from my mother’s womb had set me apart and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me.” (Gal 1: 15).

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church. The Greek word for *Peter* is *Petros*, and the word for *rock* is *petra*. It is important that we remember that the Church that we are graced to serve is Christ’s Church. We are humble servants. It is also important to remember that there is only one Church.

Reflection

Did you ever wonder why the Church decided to celebrate a joint feast day honoring both St. Peter and St. Paul? The two great saints are certainly pillars of the Church, the greatest of the Apostles. Each would warrant their own Solemnity.

The two were vastly different. St. Peter was one of first Apostles chosen and one of the twelve that walked with Jesus for three years. St. Paul did not know Jesus in the flesh. St. Paul was born into a wealthy aristocratic family. St. Peter was the son of a peasant fisherman. St. Paul was highly educated, while St. Peter was barely literate. St. Paul studied the Jewish faith under one of the greatest religious teachers of the time, Gamaliel. St. Peter had only rudimentary faith formation from synagogue attendance. So why do we celebrate this joint feast day today?

In very different ways, both men were chosen by Jesus, chosen for particular roles as leaders of His Church. As Jesus began His earthly ministry, Simon was one of the first of the Apostles to be chosen to follow Him. Jesus said to Simon, "Come and follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." Christ also chose Paul. The Risen Lord said to Ananias, "Go, for this man (Saul) is a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, and I will show him what he will have to suffer for My name." (Acts 9: 15-16).

Both men had profound experiences of the Risen Lord. Peter experienced the Risen Lord twice in the Upper Room, that first Easter Sunday and the following Sunday when Thomas was with them. Perhaps, his most profound and transformational experience of the Risen Lord was along the Sea of Galilee when Jesus pulled him aside and reminded Peter that love was the only prerequisite for discipleship, and He commissioned Peter to feed and tend His sheep, the Church. St. Paul, likewise, had a life-changing experience of the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Saul was persecuting the Church with great zeal and fervor. The Risen Lord appeared to him. "He fell to the ground and heard a voice that said to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? ...Now get up and go...'" (Acts 9: 4, 6).

Both men were overshadowed and enveloped by the Holy Spirit. St. Peter experienced the Holy Spirit being breathed on him by the Risen Lord in the Upper Room that first Easter Sunday evening. Again, at the great event of Pentecost Peter was baptized with the Holy Spirit. That Spirit transformed him and flowed through him as evidenced by his great speech at Pentecost. St. Paul, through the hands of Ananias, was baptized in the Holy Spirit. "Ananias went and entered the house, laying his hands on him, he said, 'Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 9: 17).

Both men would become Spirit filled and Spirit led foundational pillars of the Church, Peter to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. Both men would suffer martyrdom for the faith, Paul would be beheaded in Rome and Peter crucified upside-down also in Rome.

Having said all of the above, I feel that the greatest common gift of Peter and Paul were their love for the Lord and their passion and zeal for Christ. Both were men of great passion. Even before his conversion to Christ, Saul was living his faith with passion and zeal, even to the point of persecuting the Church vehemently. The Risen Lord chose to redirect and harness Paul's great energy to serve the Church that he was once persecuting. Peter was not the most educated and gifted of the Apostles, but he seemed to have the greatest passion, a passion that he could not conceal. The Risen Lord molded, guided, and directed that passion such that He became the Rock upon which He built His Church. It by design, by the hand of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit that these two men are the foundational pillars of our Church, and that is what we celebrate today, on the Solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul. So, come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ,



Personal Witness

Some years ago, my family, like many others, set out on a quest to discover our roots and began to construct a family tree. On my father's side this quickly led to Canada through my great grandparents who immigrated to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. My great grandfather worked in the lumber industry and work lured him to the United States. We were able to trace that lineage eventually back to France. I recall feeling a sense of rootedness, knowing where my family came from.

In my early years of priesthood, I made a religious pilgrimage with a group of parishioners, through Canada, visiting various Catholic Churches and shrines. The journey actually began in St. Ignace and Sault Ste Marie, Michigan where Jesuit missionary priests established communities and built churches.

From there we traveled to Montreal and visited St. Joseph Oratory. I recall kneeling at the tomb of Brother Andre Bessett for over an hour. My grandmother is certain that it was through his intercession that she was cured of her asthma as a young adult. She traveled from Northern Michigan to Montreal to meet with him. He visited with her and prayed over her. From that day forward her asthma attacks ceased, years of suffering were over.

From Montreal we journeyed east and visited the Shrine of the American Martyrs in Auriesville, N.Y. We timed the visit such that we were there for the feast day of St. Isaac Jaques, St. John de Brébeuf, and companions, on October 19th. There I was privileged to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass with the pilgrim group. We also visited the Jesuit cemetery near the shrine. The fortitude and courage of the Black Robes who brought the Gospel to the Huron and Mohawk and the Iroquoian Natives was inspiring.

From there we continued east to Quebec and visited the Shrine dedicated to St. Anne at Sainte Anne de Beaupre. As we traveled east along the St. Lawrence Sea Way I felt as if I was retracing the journey of those first Jesuit missionaries. They traveled west from France, and many followed that same route. I was also retracing my ancestors' journey west through Canada, or New France, as it was known in the early 17th century.

The following summer I journeyed to Rome, again with a pilgrim group. Upon arrival, as the group was settling in, I went off by myself and walked directly to the tomb of St. Peter. It was early in the morning, and the Cathedral was noticeably quiet. I remember kneeling on that hard marble floor for several hours. My first thoughts took me back to the pilgrimage that previous fall. I realized that I had retraced the roots of my faith to its foundation, the Rock of St. Peter. It was as if I had followed my faith "family tree" to its roots. At that moment I felt completely rooted in my faith and grounded in my priesthood. That awareness will always be with me, and for that I am eternally grateful.

