



The Holy See

SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 29 June 2002

1. *"Wrap your mantle round you and follow me"* (Acts 12,8).

This is how the angel spoke to Peter, detained in prison in Jerusalem. As the sacred text recounts, Peter *"went out and followed him"* (Acts 12,9).

With this extraordinary intervention God comes to the help of his Apostle so that he could continue on his mission. It was not an easy one and entailed a complicated and tiring route, that was to end with his martyrdom in Rome, where still today Peter's tomb is the goal of unceasing pilgrimage from every part of the world.

2. *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?... Arise, and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do"* (Acts 9, 4-6).

Paul was struck down by divine grace on the road to Damascus and from being persecutor of Christians became the Apostle to the Gentiles. Having met the Lord on the road, he dedicated himself without reserve to the cause of the Gospel.

For Paul too, Rome the capital of the empire, was reserved as a distant goal, where, with Peter, he was to preach Christ, our only Lord and the Saviour of the world. For the faith he was also destined one day to pour out his blood here, so that his name would be linked forever to Peter's in the history of Christian Rome.

3. Today the Church is joyfully celebrating the memory of both of them. The "Rock" and the "Chosen Instrument" *definitively met each other here in Rome*. Here they brought to completion

their apostolic ministry, sealing it with the shedding of their blood.

The mysterious route of *faith* and *love* that led Peter and Paul from their native land to Jerusalem, then to other parts of the world, and finally to Rome, is *a model of the journey that every Christian is called to accomplish* to witness to Christ in the world.

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Ps 33[34],5).

How can we fail to see in the experience of both the saints we commemorate today the fulfilment of the words of the Psalmist? The Church is constantly put to the test. The message that has always come to her from the holy Apostles Peter and Paul is clear and eloquent: by God's grace, *in every circumstance* it is possible for the human being to become a *sign of the victorious power of God*. For this reason he must not be afraid. Those who put their confidence in God, freed from all fear, feel the consoling presence of the Spirit, especially in moments of trial and sorrow.

4. *Dear Brothers in the Episcopate!* The example of Peter and Paul challenges us who by episcopal ordination have been established as successors of the Apostles. Like them, we are invited to pursue a process of conversion and love for Christ. Isn't he the one who has called us? Isn't it he whom we must announce with coherence and faithfulness?

I turn in particular to you *Metropolitans* who have come from many countries of the world to receive the *pallium* from the Successor of Peter. I greet you cordially, with all those who have accompanied you. The special bond with the Apostolic See which this liturgical insignia expresses is a stimulus to a more intense diligence in seeking the spiritual and pastoral communion that will benefit the faithful, and foster in them a sense of the unity and universality of the Church. In yourselves and in those entrusted to you, keep faithfully that holiness of life which is a supernatural gift of grace of the Lord.

I also greet with special affection the *Delegation sent by Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I*, led by the Metropolitan Panteleimon. The traditional visit of the Representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul is a providential moment in the journey towards re-establishing full communion between us. At the beginning of the third millennium, we powerfully realize that we must *"set out anew from Christ"*, the foundation of our common faith and mission. *"Heri, hodie et in saecula"* (Yesterday, today and forever) (Heb 13,8), Christ is the solid rock on which the Church is built.

5. *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!"* (Mt 16,16). The profession of faith that Peter made at Cesarea Philippi when the Master asked the disciples: *"Who do you say that I am?"* (*ibid.*, v. 15), assumes a particularly unique value and meaning for us who make up the ecclesial community of Rome. The witness of Peter and Paul, sealed by the final sacrifice of their lives, reminds this Church of the mission that obliges her to *"preside in charity"* (Ignatius of Antioch, *Ep.*

ad. Rom., 1,1).

Faithful of my beloved Diocese, we are more and more conscious of our responsibility. Let us persevere in prayer with Mary, Queen of the Apostles.

In following the example of our glorious Patrons and with their constant support, let us try to repeat at every moment to Christ: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God! You are the only Redeemer", the Redeemer of the world!

At the end of the Mass, the Holy Father thanked those who were present and greeted the Delegation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

At the end of this solemn celebration, I want to thank you all, dear brothers and sisters, who with your devout participation have honoured the commemoration of Sts Peter and Paul. I cordially greet the Delegation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, led by Metropolitan Simeon. I shall always remember my recent visit to Bulgaria, and invoke heavenly blessings upon the faithful of that beloved nation.

Best wishes today to all who are named Peter or Paul.

© Copyright 2002 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana