June 29th: Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Gospel text (*Mt* 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.”

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"

Mons. Jaume PUJOL i Balcells, Archbishop Emeritus of Tarragona
(Tarragona, Spain)

Today we celebrate the solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul, who were basic for the early Church and, therefore, for our Christian faith. Apostles of the Lord, witnesses of the first hour, they lived those initial moments of expansion of the Church and sealed with their blood their loyalty to Jesus. If only we, Christians of the 21st century, also know how to be reliable witnesses of the love of God in the midst of men, as these two Apostles were, along with so many others of our fellow citizens.

In one of his first interventions addressing the Cardinals, Pope Francis told them that we must 'walk, build and confess'. That is, we must move forward in our way of life, by building up our Church and by giving testimony of the Lord. But the Pope warned: "We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong. We may become a charitable NGO, but not the Church, the Bride of the Lord.”

We have heard in the Mass Gospel a central fact for the life of Peter and the Church. Jesus asks that fisherman of Galilee an act of faith in his divine status and Peter does not hesitate to say: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16). Jesus institutes the Primacy immediately by telling Peter that he will be the firm rock upon which the Church, throughout the ages, will be built (cf. Mt 16:18) and by giving him the power of the keys of the Kingdom, the Supreme authority.

Although Peter and his successors are assisted by the force of the Holy Spirit, they still need our prayers,

because their mission is of great significance for the life of the Church: they must be a strong foundation for all Christians throughout the ages; we must, therefore, also pray, every day, for the Holy Father, for his person and for his intentions.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Since we must not oppose the will of the Lord who decides, I have responded with obedience to what the merciful hand of the Master wanted to make of me" (St. Gregory the Great)

- “You, have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? (Francis)

- “(...) and in the synagogues immediately [Paul] proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' (Acts 9:20) From the beginning this acknowledgment of Christ's divine sonship will be the center of the apostolic faith, first professed by Peter as the Church's foundation.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 442)

Other comments

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

Mons. Pere TENA i Garriga Emeritus Auxiliar Bishop of Barcelona
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, is the day consecrated by the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul! “Peter, our leader in faith; Paul, its fearless preacher who became the teacher of the world” (Preface). Today is a day to be grateful for the Apostolic Faith, which is also our faith, proclaimed by these two pillars of the Church through their preaching. It is the faith overcoming the world, because it believes and announces Jesus Christ as the Son of God: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:16). Other celebrations of St. Peter and St. Paul commemorate other aspects of their lives, but today we contemplate the memory of the Apostles “through whom our religious life had its origin” (Collect): through their martyrdom they confirmed their testimony.

Their faith, and strength for martyrdom, did not come from their human capacity. For it was no man of flesh or blood that revealed to Peter who Jesus was, but the revelation of his Father in Heaven (cf. Mt 16:17). And likewise, it was indeed God's grace that made Saul recognize Jesus, the Lord, “as the one he was persecuting”. In both cases, human freedom, necessary for the act of faith, leans on the Holy Spirit's action.

The faith of the apostles is the faith of the, one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Since Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, “every day, in the Church, Peter goes on saying: ‘You are Christ, the Son of the living God’” (St. Leo the Great). Ever since, till our days, a crowd of Christians of all epochs, ages, cultures, and anything else that may differentiate, man has unanimously proclaimed the same victorious faith.

Through Baptism and Confirmation we are paving a path to testimony, that is, a path to martyrdom. It is necessary that we are always attentive to the “laboratory of faith” that the Holy Spirit carries out upon us (Saint John Paul II), and that we implore with humility to be able to experience the joy of the faith of the Church.