



Solemnity of Saints Peter & Paul, Apostles

† Sunday 30th June 2019

[The Transferred Solemnity Supersedes 13th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C]

Cycle of Prayer: Those who suffer persecution and denial of human rights

Keynote: Steadfast in faith

Reading from the Acts of the Apostles 12: 1-11

This 'rescue' story with its local colour and real life details, suggests that it came to Luke along with other 'Peter stories'. There is a feeling of 'bad king Herod' propaganda about this account, heightened by the fact that the apostle Peter is deemed to be important enough a captive, to merit no less than four squads of soldiers to guard him! *'King Herod started persecuting certain members of the Church. He beheaded James, the brother of John... he decided to arrest Peter as well... he put Peter in prison, assigning four squads of soldiers each to guard him in turns.'* Meanwhile the Christian community is in constant prayer. The narrator continues with the dramatic story: *'Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with double chains. Then suddenly the angel of the Lord stood there...'* It is almost with relief that we pass the guards at the gates to reach the street with Peter, who comes to himself: *'Now I know it is all true. The Lord really did... save me from Herod and all that the people expected would happen to me!'*

Responsorial Psalm 33 (34): 2-9 – A martyrs' song of praise in time of trial

Second Letter of Paul to Timothy 4: 6-8, 17-18

This reading selected from the writings of the other great Christian apostle who is celebrated today, hints at the dangers and hazards associated with the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet despite the many hardships Paul says: *'As for me, my life is already poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to be gone. I have fought the good fight to the end – I have run the race to the finish – I have kept the faith.'* Thus Paul attests to the constancy of his faith but acknowledges that his fidelity is not down to himself. *'The Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the whole message might be proclaimed for all the pagans to hear... To him be glory for ever and ever.'* Today it is we who are to be steadfast in faith and witness.

Gospel according to Matthew 16: 13-19

There are two points here to focus upon. The first is that the disciple Simon Peter speaks up on behalf of the others to answer the question about the identity of Jesus. *'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'* asks Jesus. *'You are the Christ,'* Peter says, *'the Son of the Living God.'* This role of Simon Peter's as a leader, despite the all too human frailty of the man, is something to evaluate. But we ourselves may also reflect upon the same question – the question of who Jesus is. We might also recognise the responsibilities placed upon Simon Peter by Jesus himself: *'You are Peter [a name which means bedrock], and on this rock I will build my church.'* Jesus' promise of the keys that symbolise real power and authority, require us to reflect upon our own personal relationship with this apostle – and with those who succeed him in the role of 'rock' – the service of steadying the faith of the Christian community, binding us together in communion, until the end of time.

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[Note: Mass of the Vigil refer lectionary for the alternative readings]