



Solemnity of Saints Peter & Paul, Apostles

† Thursday 29th June 2017

In England and Wales Cycle of Prayer:

Those who suffer persecution, oppression, denial of human rights

Keynote: God is with those who give the witness of faith

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 as 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.'* The Christian community is in constant prayer, and while *'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] – A martyr in time of trial sings God's praises!

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

The other great Christian Apostle, whose martyrdom is celebrated today, recalls the dangers and hazards associated with the proclamation of the Gospel. Despite his 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.'* Paul attests to the constancy of his faith but acknowledges that his fidelity is not due 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 we are the ones called to proclaim the whole gospel and to be steadfast in faith and witness, as were these two martyrs.

Gospel according to Matthew 16: 13-19

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.'* Simon Peter, the simple fisherman, is a leader despite the all too impetuosity and human frailty of the man. But we ourselves may also reflect upon the question Jesus asks, *'Who do people say the Son of Man is?'* Then consider 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, lead us to reflect upon our own personal relationship with this apostle – and with those who succeed him in the role of 'rock' – steadying the faith of the Christian community, binding us together in communion, until the end of time.

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Note: At the Mass of the Vigil to the Feast:

Acts of the Apostles 3: 1-10; Letter to the Galatians 1: 11-20; Gospel of John 21: 15-19.