

June 29: Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Gospel for June 29th, feast of Saints Peter and Paul, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mt 16:13-20*)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed

are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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Commentary

During one of his long trips with his disciples, Jesus questioned them about what people were saying about who He really is. After listening to their replies, our Lord asks them what they themselves think. Peter,

with his impulsive love, responds: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This confession about the Master’s identity leads to the revelation of Simon’s own identity and mission: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” And “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

In the ancient world, people often took advantage of the stability of bedrock to support the great weight of a stone wall and fortress, thus incorporating the work of nature into their architecture. And ancient cities were often surrounded by walls with access gates, which could be opened and locked with keys. Having the keys to a city meant having the power to decide who could enter or leave and when. Hence the symbol of the surrender of a stronghold was the handing over of its keys.

Peter listened with amazement as the Messiah solemnly announced that he would be the bedrock on which Jesus would raise up his Church; and that he would have power over the keys of God's Kingdom, to allow or deny access to it, thus influencing the destiny of the earth as well as that of Heaven itself.

By our Lord's will, Peter will be the leader of the twelve and of the Church, a source of unity and effectiveness for everyone. And the apostles, even those who had known Jesus before Peter and who perhaps seemed to possess greater virtue in human eyes, accepted the Master's will with veneration and respect, as they did all his indications and commands.

Later, when Peter denies Jesus during the passion, he discovers that his leadership and role in the Church is a gift from God, and not due to his

own qualities. But after the Resurrection, we see Peter's special role accepted by all the first Christians, who prayed together for Peter (cf. *Acts* 12). Hence we too have the loving duty to pray a lot for the Pope, the successor of Peter, and respect his mission in the Church as the apostles respected the primacy of Simon. As Saint Josemaría once said: "Your deepest love, your greatest esteem, your most heartfelt veneration, your most complete obedience and your warmest affection have also to be shown towards the Vicar of Christ on earth, towards the Pope. We Catholics should consider that after God and the most Blessed Virgin, our Mother, the Holy Father comes next in the hierarchy of love and authority."^[1] —

The book of Acts also tells us that God chose as an Apostle a young Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin: Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of Christians.

Thanks to the prayer of Stephen (cf. *Acts* 7:58ff.) and the refined charity of Barnabas (cf. *Acts* 9:23), Paul would be accepted into the Church. Paul persecuted the followers of Jesus with great zeal. But the apostles humbly recognized in Saul the surprising plans of God and accepted him as an apostle. For just like them, he too saw the Risen Christ and was sent to announce Him to all men and women.

The lives of these two great apostles teach us that, despite our own and others' limitations, God carries out effectively his plans of love. His grace acts powerfully in hearts that are open to Him. What God asks for fruit to be plentiful is that we, like the nascent Church, persevere united in prayer, with Mary, the Mother of Jesus (cf. *Acts* 1:12).

^[1] Saint Josemaria, *The Forge*, no. 135.

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