

THE FEAST OF SS PETER AND PAUL 29th June

Among the apostles these are the two giants, Peter the rock on which the faith of the Church rests and Paul called in God's good time to reveal his message to the nations. The two main readings, the first and the gospel reading, refer to Peter the second reading is Paul's confident word to his disciple Timothy about the 'crown of righteousness' that awaits him. In the gospel reading we have the words of Christ revealing that Peter is to be the rock 'on which I will build my Church.' In the first reading we hear how 'the rock' is rescued to continue the foundational work in the Church. We should remember that this feast celebrates both Peter and Paul as the founders of the church in Rome and it is through the witness of their deaths in that city that the Church of Rome had the most powerful beginnings and thus became the touchstone of the faith, the point of reference for the apostolic faith.

The **First Reading** is from Acts of the Apostles. This New Testament book is part two of a history of the rise of Christianity, the first part being the gospel according to Luke. They became separated when, about 150 A.D., Christians wanted the four gospel accounts bound together in one volume. The author, Luke, is a Syrian from Antioch, a doctor of non-Jewish origin, who was a close friend of Paul accompanying him on his second and third missionary journeys. Luke collected a great deal of evidence from a variety of sources which he edited. The book deals with the primitive Jerusalem community under Peter's leadership, the spread of Christianity to Samaria, to the gentile peoples and the early days of Christianity in Antioch. From chapter 13 Luke deals with Paul's three missionary journeys and ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome.

The reading, 12.1-11, comes from the earlier part of Acts where Peter is still the dominant figure. We have the story of Peter's miraculous escape from prison from the hands of Herod Agrippa, called 'king' to distinguish him from his nephew Herod Antipas, governor of Galilee, mentioned in Luke's account of Jesus' passion. There are several stories in Acts as well as Jewish literature of miraculous escapes and they should be seen as a sign of God's special protection for the young Church. The reading begins with the record of the death of James the first of the apostles to die. This is followed by Peter's arrest at the feast of Passover or Unleavened Bread, the Church meanwhile prayed 'unremittingly.' The Church at prayer, in union with Jesus, are witnesses Peter's release. The story concludes after our reading relating how Peter could not gain access to John Mark's house because they could not believe Peter had escaped.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 33.2-9, is a psalm in praise of God's justice, an alphabetical Wisdom psalm, a psalm of thanksgiving and instruction in the style of the book of Proverbs. We must praise God at all times and yet learn to be humble for it is God who alone frees me from all my fears. We must look constantly to God and need never feel ashamed for the Lord not only saves me from all my troubles but enfolds me in his loving care. The Lord is good. A clear response to the first reading.

The **Second Reading** comes from Paul's Second Letter to Timothy. Probably Paul's last letter written in prison in Rome to Timothy: "Do your best to come and see me as soon as you can" because Paul knows he will not get out of prison alive, "the time has come for me to be gone; I have fought the good fight to the end." Timothy was a convert of Paul's, a constant companion on Paul's missionary journeys. Under Paul's direction Timothy is caring for the churches in Asia, present day Turkey, and he is dealing with some heretics who taught that God was completely unattainable and that Christ should be worshipped as the highest of the angels. Paul taught against this heretical teaching in his letter to the Colossians and now urges Timothy to remain loyal to the Apostolic doctrine he had received and to hand it on to worthy and carefully chosen successors.

The reading, 4.6-8,17-18, forms part of the conclusion to this letter, Paul is in the evening of his life. He says his life 'is already being poured away as a libation.' A libation is pouring a drink offering to a god, and libations of wine, water or oil were poured over the victims of sacrifice. Paul sees his life ebbing away like the gentle pouring of a sacrificial libation as if his body were being prepared for the final sacrifice so 'the time has come for me to depart.' In the knowledge that he has done everything God wanted, he is fully confident that what awaits him is 'the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give me on that Day.' Paul concludes by praising the Lord for his powerful presence enabling him to complete the Lord's work among the gentiles and so be saved from the evil one, the lion's mouth. His message finishes with a doxology addressed to Christ. Paul ends his active ministry which has brought him to the centre of the world, Rome, from where he departs to receive his just reward.