

Sunday Readings

30th June 2024

FIRST READING

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 12:1-11

King Herod started persecuting certain members of the Church. He beheaded James the brother of John, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews he decided to arrest Peter as well. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread, and he put Peter in prison, assigning four squads of four soldiers each to guard him in turns. Herod meant to try Peter in public after the end of Passover week. All the time Peter was under guard the Church prayed to God for him unremittingly.

On the night before Herod was to try him, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, fastened with double chains, while guards kept watch at the main entrance to the prison. Then suddenly the angel of the Lord stood there, and the cell was filled with light. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him. 'Get up!' he said 'Hurry!' – and the chains fell from his hands. The angel then said, 'Put on your belt and sandals.' After he had done this, the angel next said, 'Wrap your cloak round you and follow me.' Peter followed him, but had no idea that what the angel did was all happening in reality; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed through two guard posts one after the other, and reached the iron gate leading to the city. This opened of its own accord; they went through it and had walked the whole length of one street when suddenly the angel left him. It was only then that Peter came to himself. 'Now I know it is all true' he said. The Lord really did send his angel and has saved me from Herod and from all that the Jewish people were so certain would happen to me.'

This is the word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 33:2-9. R/. v5.

R/. From all my terrors the Lord set me free.

I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise always on my lips;
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.
The humble shall hear and be glad. **R/.**

Glorify the Lord with me.
Together let us praise his name.
I sought the Lord and he answered me;
from all my terrors he set me free. **R/.**

Look towards him and be radiant;
let your faces not be abashed.
This poor man called, the Lord heard him
and rescued him from all his distress. **R/.**

The angel of the Lord is encamped
around those who revere him, to rescue them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good.
He is happy who seeks refuge in him. **R/.**

SECOND READING

A reading from the second letter of St Paul
to Timothy 4:6-8. 17-18

My life is already being 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; all there is to come now is the crown of righteousness reserved for me, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his Appearing.

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; and so I was *rescued from the lion's mouth*. The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 16:18

Alleluia, alleluia!
You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church.
And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Matthew 16:13-19

The Lord be with you. *And with your Spirit.*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.
Glory to you, O Lord.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi he put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say he is John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said 'who do you say I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up, 'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon son of Jonah, you are a happy man! Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church. And the gates of the underworld can never hold out against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Ss PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

Lectionary Year B

The Word of God

Saint of the Week



It is interesting to note the personalities of both Peter and Paul. Peter was impetuous, telling Jesus that he would die with him on Holy Thursday night if necessary (John 13:37) but later that night he denied he knew him. We also remember Peter's objection to Jesus' prediction that he would suffer and die in Jerusalem and Jesus said 'Get

behind me Satan because they way you think is man's way and not God's way' (Matt 16:23). Yet what made Peter a suitable candidate for Jesus' call was his love, so three times Jesus asked him if he loved him and asked him to look after the flock.

Paul was a controversial character in his own way. He had a fiery personality. In his early life he channelled that fire towards persecuting the Christians in Jerusalem, even witnessing the death of Stephen, the first martyr for Jesus (Acts 8:1). After his conversion Paul's preaching was fiery and upset the churches. In Acts we read that Paul then returned to Tarsus, and the next sentence says it all, "the churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria were left in peace" (9:31). Paul spent 10 years back in Tarsus before he began his preaching. It was a time for him to cool down and learn what the death and resurrection of Jesus meant for us all. Why did God call Paul? Paul was a highly educated Pharisee and it would be only someone like him who could see that faith in Jesus demanded a totally new relationship with God for Jews, and also he had a very strong personality which he needed to help the Jews to accept that Jesus was the Saviour of all peoples, and that because of Jesus there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew. Paul had the strong personality needed for that daring challenge and the insight to see that faith in Jesus the fulfilment of their Old Testament hopes was now required for salvation.

As we look at the personalities of Peter and Paul, we see that God called them to use their personalities to spread the Gospel, Peter to use his impetuous love to look after the flock, and Paul to use his training as a Pharisee and his strength of character to ensure that the non-Jews would be welcomed into the church. It is a reminder to us that our talents and our weaknesses too can become God's means of helping others, if we allow. We don't have to be perfect for God to work through us, God can work through us, faults and all, as he did with Peter and Paul.

Wednesday 3 July 2024

St Thomas the Apostle

The apostle Thomas is famous for doubting the resurrection of Jesus when his fellow apostles told him about it; but if he is the sceptical apostle, he is also the believing apostle, for having seen and touched a risen man, he made the immediate leap of faith and so became the first apostle to call Jesus God.

Nothing is known about Thomas's later career. A well-known apocryphal document called the *Acts of Thomas* relates his missionary journeys to Persia and India. Although the document as it stands is not historical evidence (it was written to provide evidence for certain heretical Gnostic teachings), it still bears witness to the likelihood of a tradition that Thomas did go to India. If you are writing something that you intend to use to convince people of a controversial doctrine, you do not invent completely new facts: instead, you weave the existing facts and traditions into something that suits your purpose. Thus the very fact that the heretics used a journey of St Thomas to support their case shows us that, in the third century at least, there would have seemed nothing implausible about such a journey. The journey would have been easy enough – important trade routes lay that way – and if some of the apostles went west, to Rome, the centre of the world, there is no reason why some others should not have chosen to go east, to the edge of the known world.

We will probably never know for certain; but the Christians of Kerala have called themselves for centuries "St Thomas Christians", and they may very well be right.

Prayer of the Week

A Prayer of St Irenaeus

Father,
give perfection to beginners,
understanding to the little ones,
and help to those who are running their course.
Give sorrow to the negligent,
fervour to the lukewarm,
and a good consummation to the perfect.
Amen.