

First reading Acts 12:1-11

‘Now I am sure that the Lord has rescued me from the hand of Herod.’

In those days: Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly.’ And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, ‘Dress yourself and put on your sandals.’ And he did so. And he said to him, ‘Wrap your cloak round you and follow me.’ And he went out and followed him. He did not know that what was being done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision. When they had passed the first and the second guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord, and they went out and went along one street, and immediately the angel left him. When Peter came to himself, he said, ‘Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.’

Responsorial Psalm 34(33):2 - 9 R5

From all my terrors the Lord set me free.

I will bless the Lord at all times,
praise of him is always in my mouth.
In the Lord my soul shall make its boast;
the humble shall hear and be glad.

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.

Look towards him and be radiant;
let your faces not be abashed.
This lowly one called; the Lord heard,
and rescued him from all his distress.

The angel of the Lord is encamped
around those who fear him, to rescue them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good.
Blessed the man who seeks refuge in him.

Second reading 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18

‘There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.’

Beloved: I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have

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kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. The Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Gospel Acclamation Matthew 16:18

Alleluia, alleluia. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **Alleluia.**

Gospel Matthew 16: 13-19

‘You are Peter, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’

At that time: When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people 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-Jonah! 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.’

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Feast days this week

Tuesday 30th June: They First Martyrs of the See of Rome

Wednesday 1st July: St Oliver Plunket

Friday July 3rd: St Thomas

Saturday 4th June: St Elizabeth of Portugal, St Pier Giorgio Frassati

The Cycle of Prayer

Those Who Suffer Persecution, Oppression and Denial of Human Rights

Background

The intention is inspired by the Feast of St John Fisher and St Thomas More (22 June).

Prayer

O God, who in your inscrutable providence will that the Church be united to the sufferings of your Son, grant, we pray, to your faithful who suffer for your name’s sake a spirit of patience and charity, that they may be found true and faithful witnesses to the promises you have made.

Singled out for service

What singled Peter out from the other disciples was his God-given insight into the identity of Jesus. It was because of his unique insight that Jesus gives Peter a unique role among his followers. He is to be the rock, the firm foundation, on which Jesus will build his church. It is an extraordinarily significant role for Jesus to give to any of his disciples. Peter's role is further spelt out by Jesus giving him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The image of the keys suggests authority. The nature of that authority is expressed in terms of binding and loosing. This is probably a reference to a teaching authority. Peter is being entrusted with the task of authoritatively interpreting the teaching of Jesus for other members of the church. Yet, this same Peter would try to deflect Jesus from taking the way of the cross, and when Jesus did take that way, Peter would deny any association with him. Jesus is portrayed by Matthew's gospel as giving a significant role to someone who remains very flawed.

If the gospel associates teaching with Peter, the 2nd Reading associates preaching with Paul. In that reading Paul refers to the Lord who "gave me power, so that through me the whole message might be preached for all the pagans to hear." Paul was the great preacher of the gospel to the pagans throughout the Roman Empire. He preached it for the last time further west, in the city of Rome, where, like Peter, he was martyred for his faith in Christ. The extract from his second letter to Timothy that is our 2nd Reading today may well have been written from his Roman imprisonment. It is a very stirring text, "I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith." The image of the fight and the race suggest that "keeping the faith" was a struggle for Paul; it did not come easy to him, just as keeping the faith did not come easy to Peter either.

Keeping the faith does not always come easy to any of us. Paul's letters show that he was very aware that keeping the faith was not due primarily to his own efforts; it was the Lord who enabled him to keep the faith. As he says in today's 2nd Reading, "the Lord stood by me and gave me power." It is the Lord who empowers all of us to keep the faith; his faithfulness to us enables us to be faithful to him; his faithful love encourages us to keep returning to him even after failure. The faithful witness of Peter and Paul speak to us ultimately of the Lord's faithfulness to us all. The best way to honour their memory is to treasure the faith that they taught, and pass it on as best we can to others.

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