

Apostles and attempts to live it. There is a unity that marks the twelve called by the Lord, but there is also continuity in the apostolic mission. St. Peter, in his First Letter, described himself as a "fellow elder" of the presbyters to whom he writes (5: 1). And with this he expressed the principle of apostolic succession: the same ministry which he had received from the Lord now continues in the Church through priestly ordination. The Word of God is not only written but, thanks to the testimonies that the Lord in the sacrament has inscribed in the apostolic ministry, it remains a living word...

Today's Gospel tells of the profession of faith of St. Peter, on whom the Church was founded: "You are the Messiah...the Son of the living God" (Mt 16: 16). Having spoken today of the Church as *one, catholic and apostolic* but not yet of the Church as *holy*, let us now recall another profession of Peter, his response on behalf of the Twelve at the moment when so many abandoned Christ; "We have come to believe; we are convinced that you are God's holy one" (Jn. 6: 69). What does this mean? Jesus, in His great priestly prayer, says that He is consecrating Himself for His disciples, an allusion to the sacrifice of His death (cf. Jn 17: 19). By saying this, Jesus implicitly expresses His role as the true High Priest who brings about the mystery of the "Day of Reconciliation", no longer only in substitutive rites but in the concrete substance of His own Body and Blood. The Old Testament term "the Holy One of the Lord" identified Aaron as the High Priest who had the task of bringing about Israel's sanctification (Ps 106[105]: 16; Vulgate: Sir 45:6). Peter's profession of Christ, whom he declares to be the Holy One of God, fits into the context of the Eucharistic Discourse in which Jesus announces the Day of Reconciliation through the sacrificial offering of Himself: "the Bread I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world" (Jn 6:51). So this profession is the background of the priestly mystery of Jesus His sacrifice for us all. The Church is not holy by herself; in fact, she is made up of sinners... Rather, she is made holy ever anew by the Holy One of God, by the purifying love of Christ. God did not only speak, but loved us very realistically; He loved us to the point of the death of His own Son. It is precisely here that we are shown the full grandeur of revelation that has, as it were, inflicted the wounds in the heart of God Himself. Then each one of us can say personally, together with St Paul, I live "a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2: 20).

Let us pray to the Lord that the truth of these words may be deeply impressed in our hearts, together with His joy and with His responsibility; let us pray that shining out from the Eucharistic Celebration it will become increasingly the force that shapes our lives.

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## ***Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul***

**Feast Day: June 29**



### **QUOTES:**

***"So humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God,  
that He may exalt you in due time.***

***Cast all your worries upon Him***

***because He cares for you...*** Saint Peter

***... "I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions,  
and constraints, for the sake of Christ;  
for when I am weak, then I am strong."*** Saint Paul

# Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul

(Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI at St Peter's Basilica Wednesday, 29 June 2005)

The feasts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul is at the same time a grateful memorial of the great witness of Jesus Christ and a solemn confession for the Church: *one, holy, catholic and apostolic*. It is first and foremost a feast of catholicity. The sign of Pentecost— the new community that speaks all languages and unites all peoples into one people, in one family of God, this sign has become a reality. Our liturgical assembly, at which Bishops are gathered from all parts of the world, people of many cultures and nations, is an image of the family of the Church distributed throughout the earth. Strangers have become friends; crossing every border, we recognize one another as brothers and sisters. This brings to fulfillment the mission of St Paul, who knew that he was the "minister of Christ Jesus among the Gentiles, with the priestly duty of preaching the Gospel of God so that the Gentiles [might] be offered up as a pleasing sacrifice, consecrated by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16). The purpose of the mission is that humanity itself becomes a living glorification of God, the true worship that God expects: this is the deepest meaning of *catholicity*— a *catholicity* that has already been given to us, towards which we must constantly start out again. *Catholicity* does not only express a horizontal dimension, the gathering of many people in unity, but also a vertical dimension: it is only by raising our eyes to God, by opening ourselves to him, that we can truly become one.

Like Paul, Peter also came to Rome, to the city that was a center where all the nations converged and, for this very reason, could become, before any other, the expression of the universal outreach of the Gospel. As he started out on his journey from Jerusalem to Rome, he must certainly have felt guided by the voices of the prophets, by faith and by the prayer of Israel. The mission to the whole world is also part of the proclamation of the Old Covenant: the people of Israel were destined to be a light for the Gentiles. The great Psalm of the Passion, Psalm 22 [21], whose first verse Jesus cried out on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", ends with a vision: "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; all the families of the nations shall bow down before him" (Ps 22[21]:28). When Peter and Paul came to Rome, the Lord on the Cross who had uttered the first line of that Psalm was risen; God's victory now had to be proclaimed to all the nations, thereby fulfilling the promise with which the Psalm concludes.

*Catholicity* means *universality*— a multiplicity that becomes unity; a unity that nevertheless remains multiplicity. From Paul's words on the Church's *universality* we have already seen that the ability of nations to get the better of themselves in order to look towards the one God, is part of this *unity*. In the second

century the founder of Catholic theology, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, described very beautifully this bond between catholicity and unity and I quote him. He says: "The Church spread across the world diligently safeguards this doctrine and this faith, forming as it were one family: the same faith, with one mind and one heart, the same preaching, teaching and tradition as if she had but one mouth. Languages abound according to the region but the power of our tradition is one and the same. The Churches in Germany do not differ in faith or tradition, neither do those in Spain, Gaul, Egypt, Libya, the orient, the center of the earth; just as the sun. God's creature, is one alone and identical throughout the world, so the light of true preaching shines everywhere and illuminates all who desire to attain knowledge of the truth" (Adv. Haer. I 10,2). The *unity* of men and women in their multiplicity has become possible because God, this one God of heaven and earth, has shown himself to us; because the essential truth about our lives, our "where from?" and "where to?" became visible, unites us and makes us brothers and sisters. *Catholicity* and *unity* go hand in hand. And unity has a content: the faith that the Apostles passed on to us in Christ's name...

We have said that the *catholicity* of the Church and the *unity* of the Church go together. The fact that both dimensions become visible to us in the figures of the holy Apostles already shows us the consequent characteristic of the Church: she is *apostolic*. What does this mean?

The Lord established Twelve Apostles just as the sons of Jacob were twelve. By so doing He was presenting them as leaders of the people of God which, henceforth universal, from that time has included all the peoples. St Mark tells us that Jesus called the Apostles so "to be with Him, and to be sent out" (Mk 3: 14). This seems almost a contradiction in terms. We would say: "Either they stayed with Him or they were sent forth and set out on their travels." Pope St. Gregory the Great says a word about angels that helps us resolve this contradiction. He says that angels are always sent out and at the same time are always in God's presence, and continues, "Wherever they are sent, wherever they go, they always journey on in God's heart" (Homily: 34, 13). The Book of Revelation describes Bishops as "angels" in their Church, so we can state: the Apostles and their successors must always be with the Lord and precisely in this way— wherever they may go— they must always be in communion with Him by this communion.

The Church is *apostolic*, because she professes the faith of the