

Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

June 29, 2008

Acts 12:1-11; 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18; Mtt 16:13-19

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"These men, conquering all human frailty, shed their blood and helped the Church grow." Thus reads the Entrance Antiphon for today's Mass. It is often said that the faith of the Church grows stronger with the blood of the martyrs. Have you ever asked yourself if your faith in Christ and in his Church would be strong enough to withstand the threat of martyrdom? Had Peter and Paul ever considered the possibility of martyrdom as the price of their faithful discipleship of Jesus? Certainly after the Crucifixion Peter must have, and that was obviously why he and his brothers were locked away in the upper room that Easter Sunday morning. Surely Paul considered it as he faced the anger of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem calling for his death.

What was it that so strengthened the faith of these men when the moment of decision came? The only possible answer is that both of them had come to know and experience Jesus on a personal level as Savior and Lord. Both had been trapped in their weaknesses and been found powerless even in the face of good intentions. Only when each faced Jesus in their weakness and confusion and in genuine humility opened themselves to his mercy and unconditional love did they know and understand that nothing --- not even their sinfulness --- could separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. They experienced the healing, saving love of Jesus and found themselves drawn into a personal commitment and relationship more precious to them than life itself.

In the First Reading we hear Peter cry out: "Nor I know for certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me." And in the Second Reading Paul writes: "I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat and will bring me safe to his heavenly Kingdom."

Our U.S. Bishops, in their 1992 letter, "Go and Make Disciples", wrote: "Conversion is the change of our lives which comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit." Somewhere in one of his letters Paul writes:

"It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can say JESUS CHRIST IS LORD." Both these great apostles had been so deeply touched by God's Spirit that nothing was as important to them as being faithful to this relationship with their Lord.

Through their intercession may we learn to open ourselves fully to the gift of the Spirit and allow ourselves to be drawn into a like commitment and relationship with our God, more precious than life itself.