

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

There is no account in Holy Scripture that places both St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome, the basis for today's commemoration. Perhaps that is why our Readings today mention only Peter. In his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul mentions that besides himself another has preached Christ in Rome. The Church of the West has long held the "other" to be St. Peter.

St. Peter writes, in his First Epistle to the Church, "She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son." It is the tradition of the Church of the West that Babylon is Rome, and that places St. Peter there with St. Paul. St. Clement, Bishop of Rome at the end of the first century, attests to the historic presence of both Peter and Paul in Rome.

Our commemoration this day of the Chief of the Apostles and of the Apostle born out of due time marks the historic date of their martyrdom. Tradition records that on this day, suffering under the persecution of Nero, St. Peter was crucified upside-down, and St. Paul was beheaded, dying a martyr's death among the seven hills upon which the antichrist would build his throne, suckled by the wolf that incessantly stalks and scatters the sheep.

So are our paraments red this day – for the blood of the Apostles and the Evangelists was the price this fallen world exacted for their testimony of Jesus. They were men like you and me. They trembled and doubted. And still they gave their lives willingly because their lives weren't their own. They were bought for a price. Their Lord, our Lord, shed His Blood that the first death have no dominion over those who believe in Him.

He died and rose again that all men be delivered from the second death and unto life eternal. So Peter and Paul live. They are safe, dwelling beneath the heavenly altar in the midst of heaven, praying for the Church on earth "How long, O Lord..."

In response to their prayer the Martyrs receive white robes, and heavenly rest is given to them for a little season, this little season, the time in which you now live, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren that will be martyred as they were is complete.

So the time until the end, the Last Day, can be measured by the number of those who die for the Gospel. When that number is complete, when the blood of the martyrs has settled in the hourglass of Divine measure, the Lord will come as a thief in the night. He will return as Judge. And woe to them by whose hands the faithful suffer.

Peter was called immediately by our Incarnate Lord before His Crucifixion. Paul was called immediately by our Incarnate Lord after His Resurrection and Ascension. According to their agreement at the first synodical convention, Peter was Apostle to the Jews, Paul to the Gentiles. Peter's fiery Pentecost preaching would be followed by Paul's public rebuke of him at Antioch.

But synodical bylaws and squabbling aside, in the end the confession of Peter, and Paul was the same: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the promised Savior who died for the sins

of the world, and rose to new life that men be justified before God by faith in Him. That is the Apostolic message, the Apostolic Doctrine around which they continued steadfastly, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, nourished by the Holy Eucharist, and fervent in prayer.

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Flesh and blood cannot reveal this eternal Truth. Peter is but a pebble, the Confession he made is the Rock on which the Church is built. Paul suffered his thorn in the flesh, and confessed himself to be chief of sinners, but his Confession is one of forgiveness, salvation and life.

It is the Confession of all who have faith in Jesus Christ “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness...”.

To believe that, to trust in Him for your salvation and life, is not something fallen men can do. Like Peter, your fallen mind cannot comprehend it, and your fallen heart cannot accept it. Like Paul, you have done the very things God prohibits, while failing to do the things He requires. And still, in God’s great love for you, in His mercy and in His boundless grace, He gave His Son to die for you. And the risen Son sent the Apostles to preach and teach, that the saving Gospel reach the ends of the earth.

The same Son, the Son of God, Peter’s Lord, Paul’s Lord, the Incarnate Christ, frees you from the prison of your sins by the washing of regeneration, by the hearing of faith. As He once sent Apostles and Evangelists and Deacons, so now He sends His Called and Ordained servants that men may obtain such faith, that you receive the forgiveness that Christ alone can give, that by trembling, doubting hands the salvific Mysteries of God be dispensed to you His Flock, for the loosing of your sins, for the strengthening of your faith, and for the salvation of your soul.

In death Peter and Paul do what they did in life: they point to Christ. For it is not their blood that avails unto your salvation. You are saved by the Blood of Christ, the Lord they worshipped and served, the Lord that gives His Body and Blood to you this day, the Lord that called Simon and Saul to proclaim His atoning death and justifying resurrection that you might hear and believe, and never die.

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