

Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Apostles 29 June
Holy Day

According to a well-attested tradition, the apostles Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom at Rome around the year 64. It is said that Paul as a Roman citizen was granted the right to be beheaded by a sword, but that Peter endured crucifixion, being nailed to the cross upside down. We cannot say whether they died on the same day, but from very ancient times their martyrdoms have been commemorated together.

When Luke wrote the Book of Acts, he focused the first half of his account almost entirely on Peter and the role he played in the founding of the Church. This part of the story reaches its climax with Peter's visit to Caesare'a, where a heavenly vision gave him courage to break with apostolic custom and baptize a family of pagans without requiring them submit to Jewish regulations. At this point, Luke shifted his attention to Paul and devoted the rest of his account to Paul's missionary journeys — a story which culminates with Paul's arrival at Rome, the very heart of the pagan world. Thus, in the Book of Acts, Peter and Paul were like runners in a relay race; it was as if Peter carried the gospel during the first lap, then handed it over to Paul, who finished the course.

A rather different story emerges from Paul's own Letter to the Galatians. Paul presented a picture of conflict, with himself as a loner pitted against Peter and the other leaders of the church at Jerusalem. The two parties eventually met and agreed to a mutual recognition of ministries. But a short time later Peter appeared to go back on this agreement, and Paul rebuked him to his face. In the ensuing controversy Paul was isolated; a number of his own associates deserted him, and he went off on his own.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is the only first-hand information that we have; and so far as it goes, Peter and Paul are frozen in a history of fierce antagonism. Today's feast bears witness that, even if their disagreement was not resolved in the realm of human history, their martyrdom united them in the paschal victory of Jesus Christ.

See Readings, page 593.

Sentence

Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.
John 21.17

Collect

Almighty God,
your blessed apostles Peter and Paul
glorified you in their death as in their life.
Grant that your Church,
inspired by their teaching and example,
and made one by your Spirit,
may ever stand firm upon the one foundation,
Jesus Christ our Lord;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Ezekiel 34.11-16 Psalm 87
Refrain Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of our God.
Or CR 1
2 Timothy 4.1-8 John 21.15-19

Prayer over the Gifts

Almighty God,
receive all we offer you on this feast of the apostles.
Help us to know our own weakness
and to rejoice in your saving power,
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Preface of Apostles

Prayer after Communion

Heavenly Father,
renew the life of your Church
by the power of this sacrament.
May the breaking of bread
and the teaching of the apostles
keep us united in your love,
in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord.