

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matt 16:18

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.

You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church,
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.

R⁷. Alleluia, alleluia.



Reflecting on the Gospel

Companions are sometimes also friendly competitors. John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote songs together and each said the other made him a better writer. Lennon wrote “Strawberry Fields Forever” and McCartney followed it with “Penny Lane.” Lennon wrote the opening and closing of “A Day in the Life,” with McCartney writing the middle section. That song in particular has been called one of the best. The Lennon-McCartney partnership had some creative tension that produced some of the most popular music of all time. Each made the other better. Perhaps something similar was at work with Peter and Paul.

Interestingly, each of the saints began life with a different name. Peter (the name means Rock) was initially known as Simon, son of Jonah. It was Jesus himself who gave Simon the name Peter as we learn in today’s gospel. In Matthew’s telling, Jesus gave him this name after Simon confessed Jesus as Messiah, the Christ. Matthew’s version of the story also has Jesus giving Simon the keys to the kingdom and saying that he would build his church on this rock (a play on words, as “Peter” means “rock,” as noted above). Matthew is the only gospel to even use the word “church” and it’s clear that this is an important topic for him. The Gospel of John, on the other hand, never uses the word “church” and portrays Jesus naming Simon “Peter” before Simon ever does or says anything! (1:42)

Paul was earlier known as Saul. Nothing so dramatic as Simon’s name-changing by Jesus happened with Paul. Instead, we are informed as an aside that Saul was also known as Paul (Acts 13:9). After that seemingly inconsequential comment, he is never referred to as Saul again! Of course, in his letters he refers to himself only as Paul. So if we had only his letters, we would not be aware that he was ever known as Saul. We need the Acts of the Apostles for that bit of information.

The renaming follows a biblical theme that appears occasionally in the Old Testament. Of the many examples, we recall that Abraham was first known as Abram and that Sarah was first known as Sarai.

We also know from the Acts of the Apostles and from some of Paul’s letters that Peter and Paul knew each other and interacted occasionally. The two men had their differences, even though each was called by Christ. Paul was known as the Apostle to the Gentiles (or the uncircumcised) whereas Peter was the Apostle to the Jews (or the circumcised). Each had their own mission within a broader purpose. And it’s likely that each made the other better. Paul spurred Peter to consider the full ramifications of baptizing Gentiles, and Peter shared stories of Jesus with Paul.

Let us recall that no one of us has everything it means to be a follower of Christ. If Peter and Paul complemented one another, our own ministry and identity will be complemented by others as well.

Living the Paschal Mystery

In the midst of summer when we celebrate the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, we are reminded that discipleship is something we do together. It is not simply a “me and Jesus” relationship. Even Peter, who was named Rock upon which the church was built and who had spent years with Jesus, had Paul, someone who did not know Jesus and who was called after the resurrection. And Paul, a highly educated Pharisee, was complemented by an “uneducated, ordinary” fisherman, Peter (Acts 4:13).

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be in community. Jesus chooses the community, not us. We might think a community of our own choosing would be better, but that is not the way Jesus would have it. Instead, we die to our own conceptions and desires, and open ourselves up to what Jesus would have.

Gospel Matt 16:13-19; L591

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi

he asked his disciples,

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter said in reply,

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.

For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.

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See Appendix A, p. 298, for the other readings.

Gospel (cont.)

Matt 16:13-19; L591

And so I say to you, you are Peter,
and upon this rock I will build my Church,
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.
I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven.
Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

FIRST READING

Acts 12:1-11

In those days, King Herod laid hands upon
some members of the Church to harm
them.
He had James, the brother of John, killed by
the sword,
and when he saw that this was pleasing to
the Jews
he proceeded to arrest Peter also.
—It was the feast of Unleavened Bread.—
He had him taken into custody and put in
prison
under the guard of four squads of four
soldiers each.
He intended to bring him before the people
after Passover.
Peter thus was being kept in prison,
but prayer by the Church was fervently
being made
to God on his behalf.
On the very night before Herod was to bring
him to trial,
Peter, secured by double chains,
was sleeping between two soldiers,
while outside the door guards kept watch
on the prison.
Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him,
and a light shone in the cell.
He tapped Peter on the side and awakened
him, saying,
“Get up quickly.”
The chains fell from his wrists.
The angel said to him, “Put on your belt and
your sandals.”
He did so.
Then he said to him, “Put on your cloak and
follow me.”
So he followed him out,
not realizing that what was happening
through the angel was real;
he thought he was seeing a vision.
They passed the first guard, then the second,
and came to the iron gate leading out to the
city,
which opened for them by itself.

They emerged and made their way down an
alley,
and suddenly the angel left him.
Then Peter recovered his senses and said,
“Now I know for certain
that the Lord sent his angel
and rescued me from the hand of Herod
and from all that the Jewish people had
been expecting.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Ps 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (8) The angel of the Lord will rescue those
who fear him.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those
who fear him.

Glorify the LORD with me,
let us together extol his name.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those
who fear him.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,
and your faces may not blush with shame.
When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those
who fear him.

The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him, and delivers
them.

Taste and see how good the LORD is;
blessed the man who takes refuge in him.

R. The angel of the Lord will rescue those
who fear him.

SECOND READING

2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18

I, Paul, am already being poured out like a
libation,
and the time of my departure is at hand.
I have competed well; I have finished the race;
I have kept the faith.
From now on the crown of righteousness
awaits me,
which the Lord, the just judge,
will award to me on that day, and not only
to me,
but to all who have longed for his
appearance.

The Lord stood by me and gave me strength,
so that through me the proclamation might
be completed
and all the Gentiles might hear it.
And 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.
To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.