

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jun 29th 2016

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul - Mass during the Day

Today we celebrate two of the great first generation saints, Peter and Paul. There are many things that could be said of them. I want to approach today's readings a little differently by considering the view of the world these men had.

In the first reading Peter is in prison. He is there because some people hated the little but growing band of Jesus' followers and King Herod got in their good graces by harming some members of the Church. There is really nothing extraordinary about this. Disciples of Jesus have been killed for their faith in every age, beginning with the first disciples even until today. Did you notice though the mention that Herod had killed James, the apostle, the brother of John, one of the sons of Zebedee? Luke mentions this but does not expand on it, tell how the Church reacted, nothing. It would be comparable to saying that ISIS had captured one of Pope Francis' top cardinals and had beheaded him. Our response? You can quite imagine the articles written, Masses held, attempts to find the culprits, public outcry, etc. Luke's response to James' beheading? Yawn. The statement is so matter-of-fact that you could miss it. One of Jesus' twelve disciples is killed. Moving right along. The fact that the world hates us and kills us is barely news.

As the first reading continues, it focuses on Peter. He is in prison, waiting probably the same fate as James, and suddenly an angel stands in his cell, wakes him up, tells him to get dressed and leads him out. When Peter comes to his senses he realizes that this is not a vision he is seeing but that this is really happening to him in the flesh. He does not stop to think, Wow, was that really an angel? If I had a vision or a dream where an angel came to me, that would be an amazing thing to think about after the fact. I might even write a book about "my angel." Peter, however, simply concludes that the Lord sent his angel to rescue him. Does he have any doubts that it was an angel that led him through that heavily fortified prison? No, in fact, he is pretty matter-of-fact about it. Peter, you saw an angel? Yawn.

In the second reading we turn to the apostle Paul. If I ask Catholics today, are you saved or does a crown of righteousness await you or will the Lord bring you safe to his heavenly kingdom, they generally will say, Well, I hope so or I think so. They generally do not have the kind of confidence to say that there is a crown waiting for me with my name on it and nothing is going to stand in my way of that award. Paul has a certainty of his salvation because of his relationship with the Lord. If Jesus rescued him from the lion's mouth – over and over again – then why would he hesitate to say with confidence that he will one day stand in the presence of God? For most of the Catholics I meet at wake services – everyone is going to heaven. However, if I talk with an individual Catholic and ask them if they are certain that they are going there, they hem and they haw.

Peter and Paul had a different view of the world, the Church, God, and the future than many of us have today. What might change for each of us if we began to see the world the way they did?

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