

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit.

Today we are celebrating the feast of the commemoration of St. Peter and St. Paul. The actual feast day is tomorrow, but since very few if any would attend a liturgy tomorrow morning, I chose to move the feast day celebration to today.

In the gospel that we heard this morning we heard:

Jesus asked His Disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” The people Jesus had been teaching we're only beginning to realize who Jesus was. I found it interesting for the people to say that He was John the Baptist. John the Baptist had been killed and they all knew it. So, were they saying John had come back to life? But they knew that John had baptized Jesus in the Jordan So how could he be two beings at the same time.

The apostles said that others thought that Jesus was Elijah. If you remember Elijah was taken up into heaven while still alive. Thus, it could be possible that Elijah had come back. Hadn't Malachi prophesied that Elijah would return? Of course, his prophecy was that Elijah would come and prepare the way for the Messiah. Since many people thought that perhaps John the Baptist was Elijah thus it would be unlikely that Jesus was also Elijah.

Apparently, many people also felt that Jesus was either Jeremiah one or the other prophets come back to life.

Jesus, wanting to lead the apostles into a greater understanding of who He was, so then He ask them “But who do you say that I am?” Peter immediately answered him “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Notice, he did not say “You are the anointed one, a son of God”. He used the article “the Son of God”. Remember, word Christ or Messiah means the anointed one. There were many anointed ones. All the priests were anointed and of course all the Kings were anointed. Peter had said, “You are the anointed one.”

Upon hearing this, Jesus said to Peter “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in Heaven. Jesus referred to Simon by his full name Simon Bar-Jonah. Bar-Jonah, means “son of Jonah”. St. Theophylact indicates that Jesus used this as a way of saying “Just as you are the son of Jonah, so am I the Son of my Father in heaven, and have one essence with Him.” He calls this knowledge “a revelation”, speaking of hidden unknown things that were disclosed by the Father.

Then Jesus went on to say to Simon “and I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Quoting St. Theophylact: “The Lord gives Peter a great reward, that the Church will be built on Him. Since Peter confessed Him as son of God, the Lord says, ‘This confession which you have made shall be the foundation of those who believe, so that every man who intends to build the house of faith shall lay down this confession as the foundation.’ For even if we should construct a myriad of virtues, but we do not have as a foundation the orthodox confession, our construction is rotten. By saying ‘My Church’ He shows that He is the Master of all, for the whole universe is the servant of God. The gates of hades are those persecutors who from time to time would send the Christians to hades. But the heretics, too, are gates leading to hades. The Church, then, has prevailed over many persecutors and many heretics. The Church is also each one of us who has become a House of God. For if we have been established on the confession of Christ, the gates of hades, which are our sins, will not prevail against us. It is it was from these gates that David, too, had been lifted up when he said, “O thou that does raise me up from the gates of death.” from that from what gates, O David? From those twin gates of murder and adultery.”

St. John Chrysostom tells us about this verse: “‘Upon this rock I will build’; that is, on the faith of the confession.” St. Leo, Pope of Rome, agrees with this interpretation writing “Upon this firmness, He says, I shall raise My Temple, and it will rise upon the steadfastness of this faith and the loftiness of My Church will mingle with the heavens. The gates of hades shall not master this profession; nor the bonds of death bind it. For these words are the words of life, and as they raise those who confess them up to heaven, so they plunge those who deny them down to hades.”

The Venerable Bede also concurs common saying: “‘Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock from which thou didst received thy name, that is, upon Me Myself, I will build My Church, Upon this perfection of faith which thou didst confess I will build My Church, and if anyone turns aside from the society of this confession, even though it may seem to him that he does great things, he will not belong to the building which is My Church.’”

Then Jesus spoke as God, with authority, “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens.” For as the Father gave you the revelation, so I give you the “keys”. By “keys” understand that which binds or loose transgressions, namely, penance and absolution. For those who, like Peter, have been deemed worthy of the grace of the episcopate, have the authority to absolve or to bind. Even though the words “I will give you” were spoken to Peter alone, yet they were given to all the apostles. Why? Because He said, “Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted.” (This quote is

from the Gospel of John 20:23. The verb in Greek for “ye remit”, *aphete*, is second person plural, obviously not referring to one person only. Had the authority been granted to Peter alone, the text in John’s Gospel would have read, “Whose soever sins thou remittest”, but since “ye” is plural, we understand that the gift was given to all the apostles.)

The feast of Saint Peter and Paul was instituted by Pope Sixtus II in the year 258. Peter and Paul were considered the Chiefs of the apostles. According to St. John Maximovich, “The Apostles Peter and Paul, without having any authority over others, both stood in front of all the others on account of their warm zeal and labors. Their life was the most brilliant and was a personification of the life and labors of all the apostles. The end of their earthly labors was especially impressive, also thanks to the fact that it occurred as it were before the eyes of the whole world. Peter was crucified upside down, and Paul was beheaded, both in Rome itself toward which at that time the gaze all the peoples was directed. The news of this quickly spread throughout the world. Their names were known throughout the empire because they had gone everywhere spreading the gospel. The Apostle of the Jews and the Apostle of the gentiles departed in Christ on the same day, as if indicating their equal nearness to God in the oneness of the Church of Christ , “where there is no Greek nor Jew.” Therefore, the day on which the earth labors ended for the leaders of the apostles, who labored more than all -- though separated in body, yet together in spirit -- became one of the most memorable days of the whole church.

Through the prayers of the Apostles Peter and Paul, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.