

The Martyrdom of Peter and Paul (Solemnity, Mass During the Day, June 29th)

Acts 12:1-11—Peter is Configured to the Passion of Christ

1. Martyrdom of James: Agrippa has the apostle James (the son of Zebedee and brother of John) put to death “with the sword” (12:2).
2. Peter’s Arrest: arrested and imprisoned (12:3).
3. Unleavened Bread: just as Jesus’ arrest and imprisonment takes place during the eight-day festival of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Luke 22:1-5), so too Peter’s arrest and imprisonment takes place during “Passover” and the “days of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 12:3-4).
4. Escape: unlike Jesus, Peter miraculously escapes (12:6-11)

Psalm 34—The Lord Delivered Me

1. Beatitude: “blessed” is “the man who takes refuge in him” (34:8-9)

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18—The Martyrdom of Paul

1. Martyrdom: Paul is “on the point of being sacrificed” (4:6)
2. Departure: the time of Paul’s “departure” (=death) is close (4:6)
3. Spiritual Athlete: he has fought the “good fight” (Greek *kalon agōna*) (4:7)
4. Reward: the “crown of righteousness” (4:8)

Matthew 16:13-19—Peter the Rock

1. Peter the “Rock”: on this “rock” (Greek *petra*) I will build my “church” (16:18)

Living Tradition

St. Jerome: *At [Nero’s] hands [Peter] received the crown of martyrdom being nailed to the cross with his head towards the ground and his feet raised on high, asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord... In the fourteenth year of Nero on the same day with Peter, [Paul] was beheaded at Rome for Christ’s sake and was buried in the Ostian way, the twenty-seventh year after our Lord’s passion. (Lives of Illustrious Men 1, 5; trans. NPNF)*

St. Augustine: *This day [June 29th] has been made holy by the martyrdom of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul. I am not here speaking of some unknown martyrs. “For their fame has penetrated every land and their message has reached the ends of the earth.” These martyrs saw what they proclaimed... One day is assigned for the celebration of the martyrdom of two apostles. But these two were one. Although their martyrdom occurred on different days, they were one. Peter went first, Paul followed. We celebrate the feast day which is made sacred for us by the blood of these apostles. Let us love their faith, their life, their trials, their passion, their profession, their teaching. (Augustine, Sermon 295, 1-2.4.7-8; in *The Divine Office*, Vol. III)*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (Solemnity, June 29th)

1. Why do we celebrate the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul on the same day? How were they both configured to Christ crucified?

For Further Reading

1. Sean McDowell. *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus*. London: Routledge, 2008.