



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

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Blessing of the Pallia and Eucharistic Celebration on the Solemnity of the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul

On the Solemnity of the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul, at 9.30, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis blessed the Pallia, taken from the Confession of the Apostle Peter and destined for the metropolitan archbishops appointed during the course of the year. The Pallium will then be imposed on each metropolitan archbishop by the Pontifical Representative in the respective metropolitan See.

After the rite of the blessing of the Pallia, the Pope presided over the Eucharistic Celebration with the cardinals, the metropolitan archbishops and the bishops.

As is customary on the occasion of the Feast of the Saints Apostles Peter and Paul, Patrons of the City of Rome, the Holy Mass was attended by a delegation from the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

During the Eucharistic Celebration, after the Gospel reading, the Holy Father delivered the following homily:

Homily of the Holy Father

Let us look at the two Apostles, Peter and Paul: the fisherman from Galilee whom Jesus made a fisher of men, and the Pharisee who persecuted the Church but was transformed by grace into an evangelizer of the nations. In the light of God's word, let us draw inspiration from their story and from the apostolic zeal that marked their lives. In encountering the Lord, they experienced a true passover: they were set free: *the doors to a new life opened before them*.

Brothers and sisters, on the eve of the Jubilee Year, let us reflect on that image of the *door*. The Jubilee will be a time of grace during which we will open the Holy Door so that everyone may cross the threshold of that living sanctuary who is Jesus and, in him, experience the love of God that confirms our hope and renews our joy. In the story of Peter and Paul, several doors open.

The first reading tells of the deliverance of Peter from prison; it is filled with images reminiscent of Passover. The event takes place during the feast of Unleavened Bread. Herod recalls the figure of the Pharaoh of Egypt. The deliverance takes place at night, as it did for the Israelites. The angel gives Peter the same instructions once given to Israel: he tells Peter to rise quickly, gird himself and put on his sandals (cf. *Acts* 12:8; *Ex* 12:11). The account, then, is that of a *new exodus*. God delivers his Church, frees his people who are in chains, and once again reveals himself as the God of mercy who sustains them on their journey.

On that night of deliverance, the doors of the prison are first miraculously opened. Then, we are told that when Peter and the angel accompanying him came to the iron gate leading into the city, “it opened to them of its own accord” (*Acts* 12:10). They did not open the door; it opened by itself. It is God who opens doors; he is the one who sets us free and opens the way before us. Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel, entrusted the keys of the Kingdom to Peter, yet Peter realizes that it is the Lord who opens doors; he always goes before us. This point is significant: the doors of the prison were opened by the Lord’s strength, but Peter then found it hard to enter the house of the Christian community. The woman who went to the door thought that it was a ghost and did not open the door (cf. *Acts* 12:12-17). How many times have communities not learned this wisdom of the need to open the doors!

The journey of the Apostle Paul is also, primarily, a passover experience. First, he is changed by his encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus and then, fervently contemplating the crucified Christ, discovers the grace of weakness. When we are weak, he tells us, it is then that we are strong, because we no longer rely on ourselves, but on Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 12:10). Seized by the Lord and crucified with him, Paul can write, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal* 2:20). Yet this does not lead to a consoling, inward-looking religiosity – like that found in a few movements in the Church today – on the contrary, the encounter with the Lord ignites in the life of Paul a burning zeal for evangelization. As we heard in the second reading, at the end of his life, he could say: “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the message fully, that all the Gentiles might hear it” (*2 Tim* 4:17).

In describing how the Lord gave him so many opportunities to preach the Gospel, Paul employs the image of open doors. He journeyed to Antioch with Barnabas, and we read that “when they arrived, they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (*Acts* 14:27). In a similar way, in writing to the community in Corinth, he says, “a wide door for effective work opened to me” (*1 Cor* 16:9). Writing to the Colossians, he urges them: “Pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ” (*Col* 4:3).

Brothers and sisters, the Apostles Peter and Paul both experienced this grace. They witnessed first-hand the work of God, who opened the doors of their interior prisons but also the actual prisons into which they were thrown because of the Gospel. The Lord also opened before them the doors of evangelization, so they could have the joy of encountering their brothers and sisters in the fledgling communities and bring the hope of the Gospel to all. Now, this year we also are preparing to open the Holy Door.

Brothers and sisters, today the Metropolitan Archbishops appointed in the last year receive the pallium. In communion with Peter and following the example of Christ, the gate for the sheep (cf. *Jn* 10:7), they are called to be zealous shepherds who open the doors of the Gospel and, through their ministry, help to build a Church and a society of open doors.

With fraternal affection, I greet the delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, whom I thank for coming to manifest the shared desire for full communion between our Churches. I also send heartfelt cordial greetings to my dear brother Bartholomew.

May Saints Peter and Paul help us to open the door of our lives to the Lord Jesus. May they intercede for us, for this City of Rome and for the whole world. Amen.
