

SS. PETER AND PAUL 2019

O ROMA FELIX

Hilaire Belloc described his first steps in *The Path to Rome* (T.Nelson and Sons, London, 1902, p.23) with these words: “It was at the very beginning of June, at evening, but not yet sunset, that I set out from Toul by the Nancy gate... till I came to the road that goes up alongside the Moselle. For it was by the valley of this river that I was to begin my pilgrimage, since by a happy accident, the valley of the Upper Moselle runs straight towards Rome..”. He eventually arrived there in time for the Mass of celebration on June 29th. As he began his journey he intended to get Mass in the village Church but it was over when he got there. He was desolate, and wrote a most moving account of what the Mass meant to him. It was a time of quiet repose, during which he got caught up in the age old ritual, in the venerable Latin tongue, and every value figured in his half hour of mainly silent prayer.

Rome in Focus

Catholics see Rome as the place made sacred by the martyrdom there of Peter, the Rock appointed by Jesus on which the church was built, and St. Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. On this day all the new Catholic archbishops in the world receive their pallium, that stole-like garment of lamb’s wool symbolic of their responsibility to pasture the flock of Christ all over the world. They share this universal pastoral responsibility with the pope. The importance of this catholicity has often been emphasised. The Anglican historian, Lord Macaulay, in an 1840 review of the Lutheran L.von Ranke’s *Political History of the Popes*, wrote: “There is not and never was on this earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church...She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all the Ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St.Paul’s” (Quoted in the frontispiece of *The Catholic Church in the Modern World*, E.E.Y.Hales, London ,1958).

Saint Peter

Historically speaking St.Peter’s background seems to be securely established. He was a fisherman from Capernaum, and Jesus lived in his house there, sailed in his boat and made him the principal leader of the new people of God. By nature he seems to have been impetuous, a strong loyal man, given to enthusiasms, ready to lead. But his failure was colossal and so was his distress. He was re-established after the resurrection, and then he made the big decisions with other apostles as to what to preach, to whom they should preach and where they should preach. He was integral to the opening up of the Good News unconditionally for all mankind, making the Church catholic. He is said to have gone to Rome with Mark as his scribe and ended his life there.

Saint Paul

Paul was a highly educated Jew and an original thinker. Initially he saw the Jewish faith endangered by Christianity. He knew exactly what he was doing as he set out to suppress this danger. The vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus effected his conversion, and this experience determined the rest of his life. Judaism had not been chosen for itself. Paul rethought every aspect of it. The Law, the Temple, the sacrifices and the priests, and the prophets, all had to be re-interpreted in the light of Jesus’passion, death and resurrection. God had not made the world for Jews and Judaism; he had chosen the Jews and Judaism for the world. Jesus as God’s only Son was in his person that reconciliation with God which was a new

creation (2 Cor 5:18), a new Adam (1 Cor 15:45). The implications of this universal thinking alienated Paul from his fellow Jews and also caused concern to converts coming from Judaism. He spent years in Tarsus before being invited by Barnabas to evangelise with him the Gentiles in Antioch in Asia Minor. From there he began his massive missionary work in Cyprus, with Barnabas, until they broke their partnership because of Mark's refusing to go any further with them then (Acts 15:37). Eventually Paul set his sights on Spain (Rom 15:24.28)-the end of the then known world- hoping en route to visit Rome which was the political centre of the world. Paul was born a Roman citizen, this citizenship a precious aid for his missionary work.

Complementarities and Contrast

In style and policy Peter and Paul did not easily harmonise. Paul especially chronicled their disagreement: I withstood Cephas to his face (Gal 2:14), and at 2 Pt 3:15 the Petrine author speaks of Paul as writing difficult things. Both pioneers, they were furthering the universal mission of mercy and love begun by Jesus, and crowning it with their final witness in Rome, the heart of the Roman Empire. This we celebrate today.

Conclusion

The unity and complementarity they achieved must always be maintained. The repentant forgiven shepherd and missionary (Peter) and the Gentile missionary (Paul)-who knew he was not yet perfect (Phil 3:12)- will always be essential in the Church's memory. They were real people and the details of their lives are so reassuringly human.

In our own day, with Pope Francis and his projected reforms, we are witnessing some of the implications of what these two apostles initiated and achieved and how they achieved it. Divisions ensue from different personalities and approaches. The mission must go on, the dialogue must go on. The powers of death shall not prevail against the Church (Mt 16:18).

A happy feast to you all.

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