

# Prophets of Forgiveness and Gratitude

In these times, where day after day the news communicates experiences of conflict, war, and hatred, how great is the risk that we as believers end up being drawn into a reading of events reduced merely to a political level, or limit ourselves to taking sides for one faction or another with arguments tied to our own way of seeing things, our own interpretation of reality.

In Jesus' discourse following the Beatitudes, there is a series of "small/great lessons" that the Lord offers. They always begin with the verse "you have heard that it was said". In one of these, the Lord recalls the ancient saying "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Mt 5:38).

Outside the logic of the Gospel, this law is not only uncontested but may even be taken as a rule expressing how to settle scores with those who have offended us. Obtaining revenge is perceived as a right, even a duty.

Jesus presents himself before this logic with a completely different, wholly opposite proposal. To what we have heard, Jesus says, "But I say to you" (Mt 5:39). And here as Christians, we must be very careful. The words of Jesus that follow are important not only in themselves but because they express in a very concise way His entire message. Jesus does not come to tell us there is another way to interpret reality. He does not approach us to broaden the spectrum of opinions about earthly matters, particularly those touching our lives. Jesus is not just another opinion – He himself embodies the alternative to the law of revenge.

The phrase, "but I say to you," is fundamentally important because now it is no longer just the spoken word, but Jesus himself. What Jesus communicates to us, He lives. When Jesus says, "do not resist an evil person; if anyone slaps you on

the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Mt 5:39), He lived these very words himself. Certainly, we cannot say of Jesus that He preaches well but acts poorly in His message.

Returning to our times, these words of Jesus risk being perceived as the words of a weak person, reactions of someone no longer capable of responding but only of enduring. Indeed, when we look at Jesus offering Himself completely on the wood of the Cross, this may be the impression we get. Yet we know perfectly well that the sacrifice on the cross is the fruit of a life that begins with the phrase "but I say to you". Because everything Jesus told us, he ultimately took upon Himself fully. And by taking it fully, He managed to pass from the cross to victory. Jesus' logic apparently communicates a losing personality. But we know well that the message Jesus left us, which He lived fully, is the medicine this world desperately needs today.

Being prophets of forgiveness means embracing good as a response to evil. It means having the determination that the power of evil will not condition my way of seeing and interpreting reality. Forgiveness is not the response of the weak. Forgiveness is the most eloquent sign of that freedom which can recognise the wounds evil leaves behind, but those same wounds will never become a powder keg fuelling revenge and hatred.

Responding to evil with evil only widens and deepens humanity's wounds. Peace and harmony do not grow on the soil of hatred and revenge.

Being prophets of gratuity requires from us the ability to look upon the poor and the needy, not with the logic of profit, but with the logic of charity. The poor do not choose to be poor, but those who are well-off have the possibility to choose generosity, kindness, and compassion. How different the world would be if our political leaders in this scenario of growing conflicts and wars had the wisdom to look at those who pay the price in these divisions – the poor, the marginalised,

those who cannot escape because they cannot manage so do so. If we start from a purely horizontal reading, there is cause for despair. We have no choice but to remain closed in our grumbling and criticisms. And yet, no! We are educators of the young. We know well that these young people in our world are seeking reference points of a healthy humanity, of political leaders capable of interpreting reality with criteria of justice and peace. But when our young people look around, we know well they perceive only the emptiness of a poor vision of life.

We who are committed to the education of the young have a great responsibility. It is not enough to comment on the darkness left by an almost complete absence of leadership. It is not enough to remark that there are no proposals capable of igniting young people's memory. It falls to each of us to light that candle of hope in this darkness, to offer examples of humanity fulfilled in daily life.

Truly, it is worth being prophets of forgiveness and gratuity today.

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## **The Life of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles**

*The culminating moment of the Jubilee Year for every believer is the passage through the Holy Door, a highly symbolic gesture that should be experienced with deep meditation. It is not a simple visit to admire the architectural, sculptural, or pictorial beauty of a basilica: the early Christians did not go to places of worship for this reason, also because at that time there was not much to admire. They came instead to pray before the relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, and to obtain indulgence through their powerful intercession.*

*Visiting the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul without knowing their lives is not a sign of appreciation. For this reason, in this Jubilee Year, we wish to present the faith journeys of these two glorious apostles, as narrated by Saint John Bosco.*

## **The Life of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles told to the people by the priest John Bosco**

*You of little faith, why did you doubt? (Mt 14:31).*

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APPENDIX ON THE COMING OF ST. PETER TO ROME

## PREFACE

In order to enter a closed building and take possession of it, it is necessary to gain favour with he who holds the keys.

Unfortunate is he who, finding himself on a small boat in the open sea, is not in the good graces of the pilot. The lost sheep, which is far from its shepherd, does not know his voice or does not listen to it.

Dear reader, your dwelling is Heaven, and you must aspire to reach it. As long as you live down here, you are navigating the treacherous sea of the world, in danger of hitting the rocks, of shipwrecking, and losing yourself in the depths of error.

Like a small sheep, every day you are on the verge

of being led to harmful pastures, of straying through cliffs and ravines, and of falling into the jaws of ravenous wolves, that is, into the hidden dangers of the enemies of your soul. Ah! Yes, you need to win the favour of he to whom the keys of Heaven were entrusted. It is necessary that you entrust your life to the great Pilot of Christ's Boat, to Noah of the New Testament. You must cling to the Supreme Shepherd of the Church, who alone can guide you to healthy pastures and lead you to life.

Now, the Porter of the Kingdom of Heaven, the great Helmsman and Shepherd of men is indeed St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, who exercises his power in the person of the Supreme Pontiff, his Successor. He still opens and reveals, he governs the Church and guides souls to salvation.

Therefore, pious reader, do not regret reading the brief life that I present to you here. Learn to know who he is, to respect his supreme authority of honour and jurisdiction. Learn to recognise the loving voice of the Shepherd and to listen to it. For whoever is with Peter is with God, walks in the light, and runs toward life. Whoever is not with Peter is against God, stumbles in the darkness, and falls into perdition. Where Peter is, there is life. Where Peter is not, there is death.

CHAPTER I. St. Peter's homeland and profession. – His brother Andrew brings him to Jesus Christ<sup>[1]</sup>. *Year 29 of Jesus Christ*

St. Peter was Jewish by birth and the son of a poor fisherman named Jonah or John, who lived in a town of Galilee called Bethsaida. This town is located on the western shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, commonly called the Sea of Galilee or Tiberias. Actually, it is a vast lake twelve miles long and six wide.

Before the Saviour changed his name, Peter was called Simon. He practised the trade of a fisherman, like his father. He had a strong temperament, a lively and witty mind. He was quick to respond, but of a good heart and full of gratitude toward those who benefited him.

This lively nature often led him to the warmest displays of affection toward the Saviour, from whom he also received unmistakable signs of favouritism. At that time, since the value of virginity was not yet widely recognised, Peter took a wife in the city of Capernaum, the capital of Galilee, on the western bank of the Jordan, which is a great river that divides Palestine from north to south.

Since Tiberias was located where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee, and therefore very suitable for fishing, St. Peter established his ordinary residence in this city and continued to practise his usual trade. The goodness of his heart, very inclined to truth, the innocent occupation of a fisherman, and his diligence at work greatly contributed to his preservation in the holy fear of God.

At that time, the thought was widespread in everyone's mind that the coming of the Messiah was imminent. Indeed, some were saying that he had already been born among the Jews. This was the reason that St. Peter used the utmost diligence to learn about it. He had an older brother named Andrew, who, captivated by the wonders that were told about St. John the Baptist, the Precursor of the Saviour, wanted to become his disciple, spending most of his time with him in a harsh desert.

The news, which was becoming more and more confirmed every day, that the Messiah had already been born, caused many to turn to St. John, believing that he himself was the Redeemer. Among these was St. Andrew, brother of Simon Peter. But it was not long before, instructed by John, he came to know Jesus Christ, and the first time he heard Him speak, he was so captivated that he immediately ran to inform his brother.

As soon as he saw him: "Simon," he said, "I have found the Messiah; come with me to see Him".

Simon, who had already heard something from others, albeit vaguely, immediately set out with his brother and went to where Andrew had left Jesus Christ. Peter, as soon as he cast a glance at the Saviour, was as if seized by love.



The Divine Master, who had conceived great plans for him, looked at him kindly and, before he spoke, showed him that He was fully informed of his name, his birth, and his homeland, saying: "You are Simon, son of John, but from now on you will be called Cephas". This word means stone, from which the name Peter is derived. Jesus communicates to Simon that he would be called Peter because he was to be that stone upon which Jesus Christ would build His Church, as we will see in the course of this life.

In this first conversation, Peter immediately recognised that what his brother had told him was far inferior to reality, and from that moment on, he became very attached to Jesus Christ, nor did he know how to live away from Him. The Divine Saviour, moreover, allowed this new disciple to return to his previous trade because he wanted to gradually prepare him for the total abandonment of earthly things, to guide him to the highest degrees of virtue, and thus make him capable of understanding the other mysteries that he would reveal to him and make him worthy of the great power with which he wanted to invest him.

CHAPTER II. Peter takes the Saviour by boat – The miraculous catch. – He welcomes Jesus into his house. – Miracles performed. *Year 30 of Jesus Christ.*

Peter continued to practise his first profession. However, whenever time and his activities allowed, he joyfully went to the Divine Saviour to hear Him speak of the truths of faith and the Kingdom of Heaven.

One day, as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, He saw the two brothers Peter and Andrew casting their nets into the water. Calling them to Himself, He said to them: "Come with me, and, as you are fishermen, I will make you fishers of men." They promptly obeyed the Redeemer's call and, abandoning their nets, became faithful and constant followers of Him. Not far away was another boat of fishermen, in which there was a certain Zebedee with two sons, James and John, who were mending their nets. Jesus also called these two

brothers to Himself. Peter, James, and John are the three disciples who received signs of special favour from the Saviour and who, for their part, showed themselves faithful and loyal to Him at every encounter.

Meanwhile, the crowd, having learned that the Saviour was there, gathered around Him to listen to His Divine Word. Wanting to satisfy the desire of the multitude and at the same time offer everyone the opportunity to hear Him, He did not want to preach from the shore, rather from one of the two boats that were near the shore. Also, to demonstrate another symbol of love to Peter, He chose his boat. Having boarded and also taken Peter aboard, He commanded him to put out a little from the shore and, sitting down, began to instruct that devoted assembly. After the sermon, He ordered Peter to take the boat out into deep water and to cast the net to catch fish.

Peter had spent the entire previous night fishing in that very spot and had caught nothing. Therefore, turning to Jesus: "Master," he said, "we have toiled all night fishing and have caught not even a fish; however, at Your word, I will cast the net into the sea." He did so out of obedience, and, against all expectations, the catch was so abundant and the net so full of large fish that, trying to pull it out of the water, it was about to tear. Peter, unable to hold the great weight of the net by himself, asked for help from James and John, who were in the other boat, and they came to help him. Together and with difficulty, they pulled the net out, pouring the fish into the boats, which both remained so full that they risked sinking.

Peter, who was beginning to perceive the supernatural aspect in the person of the Saviour, immediately recognised that this was a miracle and, filled with astonishment, considering himself unworthy to be with Him in the same boat, humbled and confused, threw himself at His feet saying: "Lord, I am a miserable sinner, therefore I beg you to depart from me." Almost as if to say: "Oh! Lord, I am not worthy to be in your presence." Admiring the gifts of God,

says St. Ambrose, he deserved all the more as he presumed less of himself<sup>[2]</sup>.

Jesus appreciated Peter's simplicity and the humility of his heart and, wanting him to open his soul to better hopes, comforted him by saying: "Do not be afraid; from now on you will not be a fisher of fish, but you will be a fisher of men." At these words, Peter took courage and, almost transformed into another man, he brought the boat to the shore, abandoned everything, and became an inseparable companion of the Redeemer.

Since Jesus Christ, when speaking, directed the way to the city of Capernaum, then Peter went with Him. There they both entered the Synagogue, and the Apostle listened to the sermon that the Lord gave there and witnessed the miraculous healing of a possessed person.

From the Synagogue, Jesus went to Peter's house where his mother-in-law was suffering from a very high fever. Together with Andrew, James, and John, he prayed to Jesus to please free that woman from the evil that oppressed her. The Divine Saviour granted their prayers and, approaching the sick woman's bed, He took her by the hand, lifted her up, and at that moment the fever disappeared. The woman found herself so perfectly healed that she was able to get up immediately and prepare lunch for Jesus and all His company. The fame of such miracles brought many sick people to Peter's house along with an innumerable crowd, so that the whole city seemed gathered there. Jesus restored health to all who were brought to Him, and everyone, filled with joy, departed praising and blessing the Lord.

The holy Fathers see in Peter's boat the Church, of which Jesus Christ is the head, in place of which Peter was to be the first to act as its representative, and after him all the Popes, his successors. The words spoken to Peter: "Take the boat out into deep water," and other words spoken to him and His Apostles: "Cast your nets to catch fish," also contain a noble meaning. To all the Apostles, says St. Ambrose, He commands to cast their nets into the waves.

Because all the Apostles and all the shepherds are obliged to preach the Divine Word and to keep in the boat, that is, in the Church, those souls that will be won in their preaching. To Peter alone, however, it is commanded to take the boat out into deep water, because he, more than anyone else, is made a participant in the depth of the divine mysteries and he alone receives from Christ the authority to resolve the difficulties that may arise in matters of faith and morals. Thus, when the other apostles join him in his boat, the cooperation of the other shepherds is recognised, those who, joining with Peter, must help him to propagate and preserve the faith in the world and win souls for Christ[\[3\]](#).

CHAPTER III. St. Peter, head of the Apostles, is sent to preach. – Walking on the waves. – Beautiful response given to the Saviour. *Year 31 of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus left the house of Peter and went to a solitary place on a mountain to pray. Peter and the other disciples, who at that point had grown in number, followed Him. But when they reached the designated place, Jesus commanded them to stop and, all alone, withdrew to a secluded spot. When day broke, He returned to the disciples. On that occasion, the Divine Master chose twelve disciples, whom He named Apostles, which means those sent, since the Apostles were truly sent to preach the Gospel, at that time only in the lands of Judea, then throughout the whole world. Among these twelve, he appointed Saint Peter to hold the first place and to act as head so that, as Saint Jerome says, by establishing a superior among them, every occasion for discord and schism would be removed. *Ut capite constituto schismatis tolleretur occasio*[\[4\]](#).

The new preachers went with great zeal to announce the Gospel, preaching the coming of the Messiah everywhere and confirming their words with shining miracles. Then they would return to the Divine Master, as if to report on what they had done. He welcomed them kindly and would then go Himself to the place where the Apostles had preached. One day, the crowds,

carried away by admiration and enthusiasm, wanted to make Him king, but He, commanding the Apostles to go to the opposite shore of the lake, distanced Himself from that good people and went to hide in the desert. The Apostles, according to the Master's orders, got into a boat to cross the lake. Night was already advancing, and they had almost reached the shore when a storm arose so terrible that the ship, tossed by the waves and the wind, was about to sink.

In the midst of that storm, they certainly did not imagine they would see Jesus Christ, whom they had left on the opposite shore of the lake. But how surprised they were when they saw Him a short distance away walking on the waters, with a bold and swift step, advancing towards them! At first sight, they all were frightened, fearing that it was some spectre or ghost, and they began to cry out. Jesus then made His voice heard and encouraged them, saying: "It is I, have faith, do not be afraid."

At those words, none of the Apostles dared to speak; only Peter, out of the fervour of his love for Jesus and to assure himself that it was not an illusion, said: "Lord, if it is really you, command me to come to you walking on the waters." The Divine Saviour said yes, and Peter, full of confidence, jumped out of the boat and began to walk on the waves, as one would on a pavement. But Jesus, wanting to test his faith and make it more perfect, allowed a fierce wind to rise again, which, stirring the waves, threatened to drown Peter. Seeing his feet sinking in the water, he became frightened and cried out: "Master, Master, help me, otherwise I am lost." Then Jesus reproached him for the weakness of his faith with these words: "Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Saying this, they both walked together on the waves until, entering the boat, the wind ceased and the storm calmed. In this event, the holy Fathers see the dangers in which the Head of the Church sometimes finds himself and the prompt help that Jesus Christ, its invisible Head, brings him, who indeed allows persecutions but always gives him victory.

Some time later, the Divine Saviour returned to

the city of Capernaum with the Apostles, followed by a great crowd. While He was staying in this city, many crowded around Him, asking Him to teach them what the absolutely necessary works for salvation were. Jesus began to instruct them about His heavenly doctrine, the mystery of His Incarnation, the Sacrament of the Eucharist. However, since those teachings aimed to uproot pride from the hearts of men, to instil humility by obliging them to believe in the highest mysteries, and especially the mystery of mysteries, the Divine Eucharist, His listeners, considering those discourses too rigid and severe, were offended, and most of them abandoned Him.

Seeing Himself abandoned by almost all, Jesus turned to the Apostles and said: "Do you see how many are leaving? Do you also want to go away?" At this sudden question, everyone was silent. Only Peter, as the head and on behalf of all, replied: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and come to know that you are the Christ, the Son of God." Saint Cyril reflects that this question was asked by Jesus Christ to stimulate them to confess the true faith, as indeed happened through the mouth of Peter. What a difference between the response of our Apostle and the murmurs of certain Christians who find the holy law of the Gospel hard and severe because it does not accommodate their passions (Cyril in John, Book 4).

CHAPTER IV. Peter confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of God for the second time. – He is made head of the Church, and the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are promised to him. *Year 32 of Jesus Christ.*

On several occasions, the Divine Saviour had made the particular plans he had regarding Peter obvious. But he had not yet explained Himself so clearly, as we will see in the following event, which can be considered as the most memorable of this great Apostle's life. From the city of Capernaum, Jesus went to the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, a city not far from the Jordan River. There one day, after praying, Jesus suddenly turned to His disciples, who had

returned from preaching, and signalling them to come closer, began to question them: "Who do people say that I am?" "Some say", replied one of the Apostles, "that you are the prophet Elijah". "Others have said to me", added another, "that you are the prophet Jeremiah, or John the Baptist, or one of the ancient prophets risen." Peter did not say a word. Jesus resumed: "But you, who do you say that I am?" Peter then stepped forward and, on behalf of the other Apostles, answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus said: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. From now on, you will no longer be called Simon, but Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.[\[5\]](#)"

This event and these words deserve to be explained a bit so that they are well understood. Peter remained silent while Jesus was only showing that He wanted to know what people were saying about Him. Yet, when the Divine Saviour invited the Apostles to express their feelings, Peter immediately spoke on behalf of all, because he already enjoyed a primacy, or superiority, over his other companions.

Peter, divinely inspired, says: "You are the Christ," and it was the same as saying: "You are the Messiah promised by God who has come to save men; you are the Son of the living God," to signify that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God like the deities of idolaters, made by the hands and whims of men, but the Son of the living and true God, that is, the Son of the eternal Father, therefore with Him the Creator and Supreme Master of all things. Thus he came to confess Him as the second person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus, almost to reward him for his faith, calls him Blessed, and in the meantime changes his name from Simon to Peter, a clear sign that he wanted to elevate him to great dignity. God had done so with Abraham when He made him the father of all believers.

The same occurred with Sarah when He promised her the miraculous birth of a son, and with Jacob when He called him Israel and assured him that from his descendants the Messiah would be born.

Jesus said: "On this rock, I will build my Church." These words mean: you, Oh Peter, will be in the Church what the foundation is in a house. The foundation is the main part of the house, entirely indispensable; you, Oh Peter, will be the foundation, that is, the supreme authority in my Church. On the foundation, the whole house is built, so that, being supported, it may endure firm and immovable. Upon you, whom I call Peter, as upon a rock or very firm stone, by my omnipotent virtue, I raise the eternal edifice of my Church, which, supported by you, will stand strong and invincible against all the assaults of its enemies. There is no house without a foundation. There is no Church without Peter. A house without a foundation is not the work of a wise architect. A Church separated from Peter can never be my Church. In houses, the parts that do not rest on the foundation fall and go to ruin. In my Church, whoever separates from Peter, falls into error and is lost.

"The gates of Hell will never prevail against my Church." The gates of Hell, as the Holy Fathers explain, signify heresies, heresiarchs, persecutions, public scandals, and the disorders that the devil seeks to stir up against the Church. All these infernal powers may indeed, either separately or together, wage fierce war against the Church and disturb its peaceful spirit, but they will never be able to conquer it.

Finally, Christ says: "And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven." The keys are the symbol of authority. When the seller of a house hands the keys to the buyer, it is understood that he gives him full and absolute possession. Similarly, when the keys of a city are presented to a King, it signifies that that city recognises him as its lord. Thus, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, of the Church, given to Peter, demonstrate that he is made master,



prince, and governor of the Church. Therefore, Jesus Christ adds to Peter: "Whatever you bind on earth shall also be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall also be loosed in Heaven." These words clearly indicate the supreme authority given to Peter. It is the authority to bind the consciences of men with decrees and laws concerning their spiritual and eternal good, and the authority to loose them from sins and penalties that hinder the same spiritual and eternal good.

It is good to note here that the true supreme Head of the Church is Jesus Christ, its founder. Saint Peter then exercises his supreme authority by performing the functions, that is, the duties, of Him on earth. Jesus Christ did with Peter, as kings of this world do, when they give full powers to some minister with the order that everything must depend on him. Thus, King Pharaoh gave such power to Joseph that no one could move hand or foot without his permission[\[6\]](#).

It should also be noted that the other Apostles received from Jesus Christ the power to bind and loose[\[7\]](#), but this power was given to them after Saint Peter had received it alone, to indicate that he alone was the head destined to preserve the unity of faith and morals. The other Apostles, and all the bishops who succeeded them, were to always depend on Peter and his successors, in order to remain united to Jesus Christ, who from Heaven assists his Vicar and the whole Church until the end of the ages. Peter received the power to bind and loose together with the other Apostles, and thus he and his successors are equal to the Apostles and bishops. Then he received it alone, and therefore Peter and his successors, the popes, are the supreme Heads of the whole Church, not only of the simple faithful but of all priests and bishops. They are bishops and pastors of Rome, and popes and pastors of the whole Church.

With what we have presented, the Divine Saviour promises to establish Saint Peter as the supreme head of His Church, and explains to him the greatness of his authority. We will see the fulfilment of this promise after the Resurrection

of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER V. Saint Peter dissuades the Divine Master from the Passion. – He goes with Him to Mount Tabor. *Year 32 of Jesus Christ.*

The Divine Redeemer, after having made known to His disciples how He built His Church on stable, unshakeable, and eternal foundations, wanted to give them a teaching so that they would understand well that He did not establish this Kingdom of His, that is, His Church, with wealth or worldly magnificence, rather with humility and suffering. With this purpose, He manifested to St. Peter and all His disciples the long series of sufferings and the disgraceful death that the Jews would make Him endure in Jerusalem. Peter, out of the great love he had for his Divine Master, was horrified to hear of the evils to which his sacred person was to be exposed, and, carried away by the affection that a tender son has for his father, he took Him aside and began to persuade Him to go far from Jerusalem to avoid those evils and concluded: "Far be it from you, Lord, these evils." Jesus rebuked him for his overly sensitive affection, saying: "Get behind me, adversary; your words are a stumbling block to me: you do not yet savour the things of God, but only the things of men." "Behold," says St. Augustine, "that same Peter who a little earlier had confessed him as the Son of God, here fears that He will die as the Son of man."

At the moment when the Redeemer manifested the mistreatments He was to suffer at the hands of the Jews, He promised that some of the Apostles, before He died, would taste a sample of His glory, and this to confirm them in faith and so that they would not be disheartened when they saw Him exposed to the humiliations of the Passion. Therefore, a few days later, Jesus chose three Apostles: Peter, James, and John, and led them up a mountain commonly called Tabor. In the presence of these three disciples, He was transfigured, that is, He allowed a ray of His divinity to shine through around His most sacred person. At that moment, a dazzling light

surrounded Him, and His face became like the brightness of the sun, and His garments white as snow. Peter, when he arrived on the mountain, perhaps tired from the journey, had laid down to sleep with the other two. But all at that moment, waking up, he saw the glory of their Divine Master. At the same time, Moses and Elijah also appeared. Upon seeing the Saviour shining, at the appearance of those two figures and that unusual splendour, Peter, astonished, wanted to speak and did not know what to say, and almost beside himself, considering every human greatness as nothing in comparison to that glimpse of paradise, he felt a burning desire to remain there forever with his Master. Then, turning to Jesus, he said: "Oh Lord, how good it is to be here: if You wish, let us make three tents here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter, as the Gospel attests, was out of his mind and spoke without knowing what he was saying. It was a transport of love for his Master and a vivid desire for happiness. He was still speaking when, after Moses and Elijah had disappeared, a wonderful cloud came and enveloped the three Apostles. At that moment, from the midst of that cloud, a voice was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." Then the three Apostles, increasingly terrified, fell to the ground as if dead. But the Redeemer, approaching, touched them with His hand and, encouraging them, raised them to their feet. When they raised their eyes, they no longer saw anyone, neither Moses nor Elijah. There was only Jesus in His natural state. Jesus commanded them not to reveal that vision to anyone, except after His death and Resurrection[8]. After this event, those three disciples' love grew immensely for Jesus. St. John Damascene explains why Jesus preferred to choose these three Apostles, saying that Peter, having been the first to bear witness to the divinity of the Saviour, deserved to be the first to sensibly behold His glorified humanity. James also had this privilege because he was to be the first to follow his Master with martyrdom. St. John had the virgin merit that made him worthy of this honour[9].

The Catholic Church celebrates the venerable event of the transfiguration of the Saviour on Mount Tabor on the sixth of August.

CHAPTER VI. Jesus raises Jairus' daughter in Peter's presence. – He pays the temple tax for Peter. – He teaches His disciples humility. *Year 32 of Jesus Christ.*

Meanwhile, the time was approaching when Peter's faith was to be tested. Therefore, the Divine Master, to inflame him more and more with love for Him, often gave him new signs of affection and kindness. When Jesus came to a part of Palestine called the land of the Gerasenes, a ruler of the synagogue named Jairus came to Him, begging Him to restore life to his only daughter, who had just died. Jesus wanted to grant his request, but upon arriving at his house, He forbade everyone to enter, and only took with him Peter, James, and John, so that they would be witnesses of that miracle.

The next day, Jesus, moving a bit away from the other disciples, entered with Peter into the city of Capernaum to go to his house. At the city gate, the tax collectors, that is, those appointed by the government to collect taxes and duties, pulled Peter aside and said to him: "Does your Master pay the temple tax?" "Certainly," replied Peter. Having said this, he entered the house, where the Lord had preceded him. When the Saviour saw him, to whom all things were manifest, He called him and said: "Tell me, Peter, who are those who pay tribute? Are they the sons of the king, or the strangers of the royal family?" Peter replied: "They are the strangers." "Then," Jesus continued, "the sons of the king are exempt from all taxes." This meant: "Therefore, I who am, as you yourself have declared, the Son of the living God, am not obliged to pay anything to the princes of the earth. However, these good people do not know me as you do, and they might take offense. Therefore, I intend to pay the temple tax. Go to the sea, cast a hook, and in the mouth of the first fish you catch, you will find the coin to pay the tribute for me and for you." The Apostle did as he was commanded, and after a little while

returned full of wonder with the coin indicated by the Saviour. So the tax was paid.

The Holy Fathers admired two things in this event: the humility and meekness of Jesus, who submits to the laws of men, and the honour He deigned to give to the Apostle Peter, equating him with Himself and openly showing him as His Vicar.

The other Apostles, when they learned of the preference given to Peter, being still very imperfect in virtue, were envious. Therefore, they went among themselves disputing who among them was the greatest. Jesus, who little by little wanted to correct them of their faults, when they came into His presence, made them understand how the greatness of Heaven is very different from that of the earth, and that whoever wants to be first in Heaven must become last on earth. He then said to them: "Who is the greatest? Who is the first in a family? Perhaps the one who sits at the table, or the one who serves at the table? Certainly the one who sits at the table. Now what do you see in me? What character do I represent? Certainly that of a poor servant at the table."

This warning was primarily meant for Peter, who in the world was to receive great honours for his dignity, and yet must remain in humility and call himself the servant of the servants of the Lord, as the Popes, his successors, usually do.

CHAPTER VII. Peter speaks with Jesus about the forgiveness of insults and detachment from earthly things. – He refuses to let his feet be washed. – His friendship with St. John. *Year 33 of Christ.*

One day the Divine Saviour began to teach the Apostles about the forgiveness of offenses, and having said that any outrage should be endured and any insult forgiven, Peter was filled with astonishment. This was because he was prejudiced, like all the Jews, in favour of Jewish traditions, which allowed the offended person to inflict a penalty on the offender, called the penalty of retaliation. He therefore turned to Jesus and said: "Master, if the enemy were to insult

us seven times and seven times came to ask for forgiveness, should I forgive him seven times?" Jesus, who had come to mitigate the rigors of the old law with the holiness and purity of the Gospel, replied to Peter that "not only should he forgive seven times, but seventy times seven," an expression that means one must always forgive. The Holy Fathers recognise in this event primarily the obligation that every Christian has to forgive every affront to his neighbour, at all times and in all places. Secondly, they recognise the authority given by Jesus to St. Peter and to all sacred ministers to forgive the sins of men, whatever their gravity and number, provided they are repentant and promise sincere amendment.

On another day, Jesus was teaching the people, speaking of the great reward that those who despised the world and made good use of riches would receive, detaching their hearts from the goods of the earth. Peter, who had not yet received the light of the Holy Spirit and who more than the others needed to be instructed, with his usual frankness turned to Jesus and said: "Master, we have abandoned everything and followed you: we have done what you commanded. What then will be the reward you will give us?" The Saviour appreciated Peter's question and, while praising the detachment of the Apostles from all earthly thing, assured them that a special reward was reserved for them because, having left their possessions, they had followed him. "You," he said, "who have followed me, will sit on twelve majestic thrones and, companions in my glory, will judge with me the twelve tribes of Israel and with them all of humanity."

Not long after, Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem and began to discuss with Peter about the structure of that grand building and the preciousness of the stones that adorned it. The Divine Saviour then took the opportunity to predict its complete ruin, saying: "Of this magnificent temple, there will not remain one stone upon another." Then Jesus, in leaving the city and passing near a fig tree that he had cursed, Peter, amazed, pointed out to the Divine Master

how that tree had already become withered and dry. It was a proof of the truth of the Saviour's promises. Therefore, Jesus, to encourage the Apostles to have faith, replied that by virtue of faith they would obtain everything they asked for.

The virtue, moreover, that Christ wanted deeply rooted in the hearts of the Apostles and especially of Peter, was humility, and He gave them luminous examples of this on many occasions, especially on the eve of His Passion. It was the first day of the Passover of the Jews, which was to last seven days and is usually called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus sent Peter and John to Jerusalem saying: "Go and prepare the necessary things for the Passover." They said: "Where do you want us to prepare them?" Jesus replied: "Entering the city, you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Go with him, and he will show you a large upper room furnished, and there prepare what is needed for this purpose." So they did. When evening came on that night, which was the last of the Saviour's mortal life, wanting to institute the Sacrament of the Eucharist, he began an act that demonstrates the purity of soul with which every Christian must approach this sacrament of divine love, and at the same time serves to curb the pride of men until the end of the world. While He was at table with His disciples, towards the end of the meal, the Lord rose from the table, took a towel, girded Himself, and poured water into a basin, showing that He wanted to wash the feet of the Apostles, who, seated and amazed, were watching what their Master wanted to do.

Jesus then came with the water to Peter and, kneeling before him, asked him for his foot to wash. Good Peter, horrified to see the Son of God in that act of a poor servant, still remembering that he had just seen him shining with light, full of shame and almost in tears, said: "What are you doing, Master, what are you doing? You wash my feet? Never! I can never allow it." The Saviour said to him: "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand later. Therefore, be careful not to contradict me. If I do not

wash your feet, you will have no part with me," that is, you will be deprived of all my goods and be disinherited. At these words, good Peter was terribly troubled. On one hand, he was pained to be separated from his Master. He did not want to disobey him or sadden him. On the other hand, he thought he could not allow such a humble service to Him. However, when he understood that the Saviour wanted obedience, he said: "O Lord, since you wish it so, I must not and do not want to resist your will. Do with me whatever you please. If it is not enough to wash my feet, wash my hands and my head as well."

The Saviour, after having completed that act of profound humility, turned to his Apostles and said to them: "Have you seen what I have done? If I, who am your Master and Lord, have washed your feet, you must do likewise among yourselves." These words mean that a follower of Jesus Christ must never refuse any work, even humble, of charity, whenever it promotes the good of the neighbour and the glory of God.

During this dinner, an event occurred that particularly concerns St. Peter and St. John. It has already been observed how the Divine Redeemer had a special affection for these two Apostles: one for the sublime dignity to which he was destined, the other for the singular purity of conduct. They, in turn, loved their Saviour with the most intense love, and were bound to each other by the bonds of a very special friendship, of which the Redeemer Himself showed pleasure, because it was founded on virtue.

While Jesus was at the table with His Apostles, in the middle of the meal, He predicted that one of them would betray him. At this announcement, everyone was frightened, and each fearing for himself, began to look at one another saying: "Is it I?" Peter, being more fervent in love for his Master, desired to know who that traitor was. He wanted to ask Jesus, but to do so secretly, so that none of those present would notice. Therefore, without saying a word, he signalled to John to be the one to ask that question. This beloved apostle had taken a place close to Jesus, and his position was such that he rested his head on his chest, while Peter's head rested on



John's. John satisfied the desire of his friend with such secrecy that none of the Apostles could understand either Peter's signal, or John's inquiry, or Christ's response. For at that time, no one came to know that the traitor was Judas Iscariot, except for the two privileged apostles.

CHAPTER VIII. Jesus predicts Peter's denial and assures him that his faith will not fail. – Peter follows him to the Garden of Gethsemane. – He cuts off Malchus's ear. – His fall, his repentance. *Year 33 of Christ.*

As the time of the Saviour's passion approached, the faith of the Apostles was to be put to a severe test. After the Last Supper, when Jesus was about to leave the upper room, He turned to His Apostles and said: "This night is very painful for me and of great danger for all of you: such things will happen to me that you will be scandalised, and what you have known and now believe about me will no longer seem true to you. Therefore, I tell you that this night you will all turn your backs on me." Peter, following his usual fervour, was the first to respond: "What? All of us turn our backs on you? Even if all these were so weak as to abandon you, I certainly will never do so. In fact, I am ready to die with you." "Ah Simon, Simon," replied Jesus Christ, "behold, Satan has devised a terrible temptation against you, and he will sift you like wheat; and you yourself, this night, before the rooster crows twice, will deny me three times." Peter spoke guided by a warm feeling of affection and did not consider that without divine help, man falls into deplorable excesses. Therefore, he renewed the same promises saying: "No, certainly; it may be that all deny you, but I never will." Jesus, who well knew that such presumption of Peter came from thoughtless fervour and great tenderness towards him, had compassion for him and added: "You will certainly fall, Oh Peter, as I told you. However, do not lose heart. I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and you, when you have turned back from your fall, confirm your brothers: *Rogavi pro te, ut non deficiat fides tua, et tu aliquando*

*conversus, confirma fratres tuos.*" With these words, the Divine Saviour promised a particular assistance to the Head of His Church, so that his faith may never fail, that is to say, that as the universal Teacher in matters concerning religion and morality, he taught and will always teach the truth, although in private life he may fall into sin, as indeed happened to St. Peter.

Meanwhile, Jesus Christ, after that memorable Eucharistic Supper, late at night left the upper room with the eleven Apostles and went to the Mount of Olives. When he arrived there, he took with him Peter, James, and John, and withdrew to a part of that mountain called Gethsemane, where He was accustomed to go to pray. Jesus moved away from the three Apostles as far as a stone's throw and began to pray. Before doing so, in the act of separating from them, He warned them saying: "Watch and pray, for temptation is near." But Peter and his companions, both because of the late hour and their fatigue, sat down to rest and fell asleep.

This was a new fault of Peter, who was to follow the Saviour's command by watching and praying. In the meantime, the guards arrived in the garden to capture Jesus and take Him to prison. Peter, seeing them just then, ran to meet them to drive them away, and seeing that they were resisting, he drew the sword he had with him and, striking wildly, cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest Caiaphas, named Malchus.

These were not the testimonies of loyalty that Jesus expected from Peter, nor had He ever taught him to oppose force with force. This was an effect of his fervent love for the Divine Saviour but out of purpose. Hence Jesus said to Peter: "Put your sword back in its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Then, putting into practise what He had taught many times in His preaching, that is to do good to those who do evil to us, he took the severed ear and, with great kindness, restored it with his holy hands to its place, so that it was instantly healed.

Peter and the other Apostles, seeing that all

resistance was useless and that they would rather run the risk for themselves, set aside the promises made shortly before to the Master, fled and abandoned Jesus, leaving Him alone in the hands of His executioners. Peter, on the other hand, ashamed of his cowardice, confused and indecisive, did not know where to go or where to stay. Therefore, from a distance, he followed Jesus to the courtyard of the palace of Caiaphas, the head of all the Jewish priests, and through the recommendation of an acquaintance, he managed to enter. Jesus was there inside in the power of the Scribes and Pharisees, who had accused Him before that tribunal and were trying to have Him condemned with some appearance of justice.

As soon as he entered that place, our Apostle found a crowd of guards warming themselves by the fire that was lit there, and he sat down with them. In the light of the flames, the servant girl who had graciously let him in, seeing him pensive and melancholic, began to suspect that he was a follower of Jesus. "Hey," she said to him, "you seem to be a companion of the Nazarene, don't you?" The Apostle, seeing himself discovered in front of so many people, was astonished. Fearing imprisonment for himself, perhaps even death, having lost all courage, he replied: "Woman, you are mistaken. I am not one of them. I do not even know that Jesus of whom you speak." Having said this, the rooster crowed for the first time, and Peter did not pay attention to it.

After staying for a moment in the company of those guards, he went to the vestibule. While returning to the fire, another servant girl, pointing to Peter, also began to say to those around: "This man was also with Jesus of Nazareth." The poor disciple, even more frightened by these words, almost beside himself, replied that he did not know Him nor had he ever seen Him. Peter spoke this way, but his conscience reproached him and he felt the sharpest remorse. Therefore, all pensive, with a troubled eye and uncertain step, he stood, went in and out without knowing what to do. However, deep calls to deep.

After a few moments, a relative of that Malchus

whose ear Peter had cut off saw him and, fixing his gaze on him, said: "Certainly this man is one of the companions of the Galilean! You are certainly, your speech betrays you. And did I not see you in the garden with him when you cut off Malchus's ear?" Peter, seeing himself in such a bad situation, could find no other escape than to swear and deny that he knew Him. He had not yet finished uttering the last syllable when the rooster crowed for the second time.

When the rooster crowed the first time, Peter had not paid attention, but this second time he took note of the number of his denials, recalled the prediction of Jesus Christ and saw it precisely fulfilled. At this memory, he was troubled, his heart felt all bitter, and turning his gaze towards good Jesus, his gaze met His. This glance from Christ was a mute act, but at the same time a stroke of grace, which, like a sharp arrow, went to pierce his heart, not to give him death, but to restore him to life[\[10\]](#).

At that moment of kindness and mercy, Peter, shaken as if from a deep sleep, felt his heart swell and was moved to tears by sorrow. To give free rein to his weeping, he left that ill-fated place and went to weep for his fault, invoking forgiveness from divine mercy. The Gospel tells us only that: *et egressus Petrus flevit amare*: Peter went out and wept bitterly. The holy Apostle bore remorse all his life for this fall, and it can be said that from that hour until his death he did nothing but weep for his sin, doing harsh penance for it. It is said that he always had a cloth nearby to dry his tears, and that every time he heard the rooster crow, he would start and tremble, recalling the painful moment of his fall. Indeed, the tears he had continually made two furrows on his cheeks. Blessed Peter who so quickly abandoned sin and did such long and harsh penance for it! Blessed also is that Christian who, after having the misfortune of following Peter in sin, also follows him in repentance.

CHAPTER IX. Peter at the tomb of the Saviour. – Jesus appears to him. – On the lake of Tiberias, he gives three distinct

signs of love towards Jesus, who effectively makes him the head and supreme shepherd of the Church.

While the Divine Saviour was being dragged through various Tribunals and then led to Calvary to die on the Cross, Peter did not lose sight of Him, for he desired to see where that mournful spectacle would end.

And although the Gospel does not say so, there are reasons to believe that he was with his friend John at the foot of the Cross. But after the death of the Saviour, good Peter, all humbled by the unworthy way in which he had responded to the great love of Jesus, continually thought of Him, oppressed by the most bitter sorrow and repentance.

However, this humiliation of his was precisely what attracted the kindness of Jesus towards Peter. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared primarily to Mary Magdalene and to other pious women, because they alone were at the tomb to embalm Him. After revealing Himself to them, he added: "Go quickly, tell my brothers and especially Peter that you have seen me alive." Peter, who perhaps thought he was already forgotten by the Master, upon hearing from Jesus the news of the Resurrection announced to him by name, burst into a torrent of tears and could no longer contain the joy in his heart.

Carried away by joy and the desire to see the Risen Master, he, in the company of his friend John, began to run quickly up Mount Calvary. Their spirits, however, were then agitated by two opposing feelings: the hope of seeing Jesus risen and the fear that the report made to them by the pious women was only the effect of their imagination, for at first they did not understand how He was truly to rise. Meanwhile, they both ran together, but John, being younger and swifter, reached the tomb before Peter. However, he did not have the courage to enter and, bending down a little at the entrance, saw the wrappings in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped. Shortly after, Peter also arrived, who, whether because of the greater authority he knew he enjoyed, or because he was of a more resolute and ready character, without

stopping outside, immediately entered the tomb, examined it in all its parts, searching and feeling everywhere, and saw nothing but the wrappings and the cloth rolled up apart. Following Peter's example, John then also entered, and they both agreed that the body of Jesus had been taken away from the tomb and stolen. For although they ardently desired that the Divine Master had risen, they still did not believe in this sweetest truth. The two Apostles, after making such minute observations in the tomb, went out and returned to where they had come from. But on that same day, Jesus wanted to visit Peter in person to comfort him with His presence and, what is more, appeared to Peter before all the other Apostles.

The Divine Saviour manifested Himself to His Apostles several times after the Resurrection to instruct and confirm them in the faith.

One day, Peter, James, and John with some other disciples, both to avoid idleness and to earn something to eat, went fishing on the lake of Tiberias. They all got into a boat, moved it a little away from the shore, and cast their nets. They toiled all night casting the nets now here, now there, but all in vain. Day was breaking and they had caught nothing. Then the Lord appeared on the shore, where, without making Himself known, as if He wanted to buy some fish: "Children," He said to them, "do you have anything to eat?" "*Pueri, numquid pulmentarium habetis?*" "No," they replied, "we have toiled all night and have caught nothing." Jesus added: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will catch." Whether they were moved by an inner impulse, or whether to follow the advice of the one who seemed to them an expert fisherman, they cast down the net and shortly after found it full of so many and such large fish that they could hardly pull it out. At this unexpected catch, John turned to the one who had given that suggestion from the shore and, having recognised that it was Jesus, said immediately to Peter: "It is the Lord." Peter, hearing these words, carried away by his usual fervour, without further consideration threw himself into the water and swam to the shore to be the first

to greet the Divine Master. While Peter was staying familiarly with Jesus, the other Apostles also approached, dragging the net behind them.

When they landed, they found the fire lit by the very hand of the Divine Saviour and bread prepared with fish that was roasting. The Apostles, moved by the desire to see the Lord, left all the fish in the boat, so the Saviour said to them: "Bring here those fish that you have just caught." Peter, who was the quickest and most obedient in everything, upon hearing that order, immediately went up into the boat and alone pulled the net full of 153 large fish to shore.

The sacred text warns us that it was a miracle that the net was not torn, although there were so many fish and so big. The holy Fathers see in this fact the divine power of the head of the Church, who, assisted in a particular way by the Holy Spirit, guides the mystical ship full of souls to lead them to the feet of Jesus Christ, who has redeemed them and awaits them in Heaven.

Meanwhile, Jesus had prepared the meal Himself, and inviting the Apostles to sit on the bare sand, He distributed to each of them bread and fish that He had roasted. After the meal, Jesus Christ began to speak again with St. Peter and to question him in front of his companions in the following manner: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes," replied Peter, "you know that I love you." Jesus said to him: "Feed my lambs." Then he asked him again: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" "Lord," replied Peter, "you know well that I love you." Jesus repeated: "Feed my lambs." The Lord added: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter, seeing himself questioned three times on the same subject, was greatly troubled. At that moment, the promises he had made before returned to his mind, which he had violated, and therefore he feared that Jesus Christ did not see in his heart a love much less than he thought he had, and wanted to predict other denials. Therefore, distrusting his own strength, Peter humbly replied: "Lord, you know everything, and therefore you know that I love you." These words meant

that Peter was sure at that moment of the sincerity of his affections, but he was not equally sure for the future. Jesus, who knew his desire to love Him and the sincerity of his affections, comforted him saying: "Feed my sheep." With these words, the Son of God fulfilled the promise made to St. Peter to make him the prince of the Apostles and the foundational stone of the Church. In fact, the lambs here signify all the faithful Christians, scattered in various parts of the world, who must be subject to the Head of the Church, just as lambs do to their shepherd. The sheep then signify the bishops and other sacred ministers, who indeed provide the pasture of the doctrine of Jesus Christ to the faithful Christians, but always in agreement, always united and subject to the supreme shepherd of the Church, who is the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth.

Based on these words of Jesus Christ, Catholics of all times have always believed as a truth of faith that St. Peter was appointed by Jesus Christ as His Vicar on earth and the visible head of the whole Church, and that he received from Him the fullness of authority over the other apostles and all the faithful. This authority passed to the Roman Pontiffs, his successors. This was defined as a dogma of faith at the Florentine Council in the year 1439, with the following words: "We define that the holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff is the successor of the Prince of the Apostles, the true Vicar of Christ and the head of the whole Church, the teacher and father of all Christians, and that to him in the person of blessed Peter was given by our Lord Jesus Christ full power to feed, rule, and govern the Universal Church."

The holy Fathers also note that the Divine Redeemer wanted Peter to publicly say three times that he loved Him, almost to repair the scandal he had given by denying Him three times.

## CHAPTER X. Infallibility of St. Peter and his successors.

The Divine Saviour gave the Apostle Peter the supreme power in the Church, namely the primacy of honour and



jurisdiction, which we will soon see exercised by him. But in order for him, as the head of the Church, to exercise this supreme authority properly, Jesus Christ also endowed him with a singular prerogative, namely, infallibility. Since this is one of the most important truths, I believe it is good to add something in confirmation and declaration of the doctrine that the Catholic Church has professed at all times regarding this dogma.

First of all, it is necessary to understand what is meant by infallibility. It means that the Pope, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, fulfilling the office of Pastor or Teacher of all Christians, and judges matters concerning faith or morals, cannot, by divine assistance, fall into error, thus neither deceive himself nor deceive others. It should be noted, therefore, that infallibility does not extend to all actions, to all words of the Pope. It does not pertain to him as a private man, but only as Head, Pastor, Teacher of the Church, and when he defines some doctrine concerning faith or morals and intends to bind all the faithful. Furthermore, infallibility should not be confused with impeccability. Indeed, Jesus Christ promised the first to Peter and his successors in instructing men, but not the second, in which He did not wish to privilege them.

That said, we say that one of the best-proven truths is precisely that of doctrinal infallibility, granted by God to the Head of the Church. The words of Jesus Christ cannot fail, for they are God's words. Now, Jesus Christ said to Peter: "You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

According to these words, the gates[\[11\]](#), that is, the infernal powers, among which error and falsehood hold the first place, will never prevail against either the Rock or the Church that is founded upon it. But if Peter, as Head of the Church, were to err in matters of faith and morals, it would

be as if the foundation were lacking. If this were lacking, the building, that is, the Church itself, would fall, and thus the foundation and the structure would have to be said to be defeated and brought down by the gates of Hell. Now, this, after the aforementioned words, is not possible, unless one wishes to blaspheme by asserting that the promises of the Divine Founder were fallible: a horrible thing not only for Catholics but for the schismatics and heretics themselves.

Moreover, Jesus Christ assured that everything Peter, as Head of the Church, would bind or loose, approve or condemn on earth would be ratified in Heaven. Therefore, since error cannot be approved in Heaven, it must necessarily be admitted that the Head of the Church is infallible in his judgments, in his decisions made as the Vicar of Jesus Christ, so that he, as teacher and judge of all the faithful, does not approve or condemn anything that cannot be equally approved or condemned in Heaven. This leads to infallibility.

This is even more evident in the words that Jesus Christ addressed to Peter when He commanded him to confirm the other Apostles in faith: "Simon, Simon," he said, "behold, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and when you have returned, strengthen your brothers." Jesus Christ, therefore, prays that the faith of the Pope may not fail. Now it is impossible that the prayer of the Son of God should not be granted. Furthermore: Jesus commanded Peter to confirm the other pastors in faith and to have them listen to him. Yet, if he had not also communicated doctrinal infallibility to him, He would have put him in danger of deceiving them and dragging them into the abyss of error. Can it be believed that Jesus Christ wished to leave the Church and its Head in such danger?

Finally, the Divine Redeemer, after His Resurrection, established Peter as the supreme Pastor of His flock, that is, of His Church, entrusting to him the care of the lambs and the sheep: "Feed my lambs," He said to him, "feed my sheep." Instruct, teach both the lambs and the sheep, guiding them to pastures of eternal life. But if Peter were to

err in matters of doctrine, either through ignorance or malice, then he would be like a shepherd leading the lambs and the sheep to poisoned pastures, which would give them death instead of life. Now, can it be supposed that Jesus Christ, who gave everything for the salvation of His little sheep, wished to establish such a shepherd for them?

Hence, according to the Gospel, the Apostle Peter had the gift of infallibility:

I. Because he is the fundamental Rock of the Church of Jesus Christ;

II. Because his judgments must also be confirmed in Heaven;

III. Because Jesus Christ prayed for his infallibility, and His prayer cannot fail;

IV. Because he must confirm in faith, feed, and govern not only the simple faithful but also the pastors themselves.

It is now useful to add that together with the supreme authority over the whole Church, the gift of infallibility passed from Peter to his successors, that is, to the Roman Pontiffs.

This is also a truth of faith.

Jesus Christ, as we have seen, gave broader power and endowed Saint Peter with the gift of infallibility in order to provide for the unity and integrity of faith in his followers. "Among twelve, one is elected," reflects the greatest doctor Saint Jerome, "so that, with a Head established, every occasion of schism may be removed: *Inter duodecim unus eligitur, ut, capite constituto, schismatis tolleretur occasio.*[\[12\]](#)" "The primacy is conferred on Peter," wrote Saint Cyprian, "so that the Church may be shown to be one, and one the chair of truth."[\[13\]](#)"

That being said, we say: the need for unity and truth did not exist only at the time of the Apostles, but also in the subsequent centuries. Indeed, this need increased even more with the expansion of the Church itself and with the passing of the Apostles, who were privileged by Jesus Christ

with extraordinary gifts for the promulgation of the Gospel. Therefore, according to the intention of the Divine Saviour, the authority and infallibility of the first Pope were not to cease at his death, but to be transmitted to another, thus perpetuating in the Church.

This transmission is made very clear especially by the words of Jesus Christ to Peter, with which He established him as the base, the foundation of the Church. It is evident that the foundation must last as long as the building. This is impossible without that. But the building, which is the Church, must last until the end of the world, having promised the same Jesus to be with His Church until the end of time: "And behold, I am with you all days, until the end of the world." Therefore, until the end of time, the foundation that is Peter must last, but since Peter is dead, authority and infallibility must still exist in someone else. They indeed exist in his successors in the See of Rome, that is, they exist in the Roman Pontiffs. Therefore, it can be said that Peter still lives and judges in his successors. Thus indeed expressed themselves the legates of the Apostolic See, with the applause of the general Council of Ephesus in the year 431: "Who until this time, and always in his successors, lives and exercises judgment."

For this reason, from the very first centuries of the Church, when religious questions arose, recourse was made to the Church of Rome, and its decisions and judgments were held as a rule of faith. Let the words of Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, who died a martyr in the year 202, suffice as proof. "To confuse," he wrote, "all those who in any way for vain glory, for blindness or malice gather in councils, it will suffice to indicate to them the tradition and the faith that the greatest and oldest of all churches, the Church known to the whole world, the Roman Church, founded and established by the glorious Apostles Peter and Paul, has announced to men and transmitted to us through the succession of its bishops. Indeed, to this Church, because of its preeminent primacy, every Church, that is, all the faithful from whatever part

they may be, must recourse. [\[14\]](#)”

Regarding the infallibility of the Pope, some heretics, including Protestants and the so-called Old Catholics, deny it, saying that only God is infallible.

We do not deny that God alone is infallible by nature; but we say that He can grant the gift of infallibility even to a man, assisting him in such a way that he does not go astray. God alone can perform true miracles. Yet we know from Sacred Scripture itself that many men did so, and astonishingly. They performed them not by their own virtue, but by divine virtue communicated to them. Thus, the Pope is not infallible by his own nature, but by virtue of Jesus Christ, who willed it so for the good of the Church.

Moreover, the Protestants and their followers, who still believe in the Gospel, should not make such a fuss because we Catholics hold a man to be infallible when he serves as our supreme and universal teacher. Indeed, those still with us, without believing they are doing wrong to God, consider at least four to be infallible, namely the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Actually, they consider all the sacred writers of both the New and Old Testaments to be infallible. Now, if it is possible, rather necessary, to believe in the infallibility of those men who transmitted to us in writing the Word of God, what can prevent us from believing in the infallibility of another man destined to preserve it intact and explain it to us in the name of God Himself?

Reason itself suggests to us that it is very fitting that Jesus Christ granted the gift of infallibility to His Vicar, the Teacher of all the faithful. And what? If a wise and loving father has children to be educated, is it not true that he chooses the most learned and wisest teacher he can find? Is it not also true that if this father could give that teacher the gift of never deceiving the child, either through ignorance or malice, he would communicate it to him wholeheartedly? Now, all men, especially Christians, are children of God. The Pope is their great Teacher established

by Him. Now, God could confer upon him the gift of never falling into error when teaching them. Who then can reasonably admit that this most excellent Father did not do what we miserable beings would do?

Throughout the centuries and by all true Catholics, the infallibility of the successor of Peter has been constantly believed. But in recent times, some heretics arose to challenge it. Indeed, from the lack of an express definition, even some poorly advised Catholics took the opportunity to doubt it. Therefore, on July 18, 1870, the Vatican Council, composed of over 700 Bishops presided over by the immortal Pius IX, in order to protect the faithful from every error, solemnly defined papal infallibility as a dogma of faith with these words: "When the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the Divine Redeemer willed His church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable. So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema."

After this definition, whoever denies papal infallibility would commit grave disobedience to the Church, and if he were obstinate in his error, he would no longer belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, and we should avoid him as a heretic. "Whoever does not listen to the Church," says the Gospel, "let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector," that is, excommunicated.

CHAPTER XI. Jesus predicts death on the cross to St. Peter. – He promises assistance to the Church until the end of the world. – Return of the Apostles to the Upper Room. *Year 33 of*

*Jesus Christ.*

After St. Peter understood that the repeated questions of the Saviour were not a sign of his fall, but were the confirmation of the high authority that had been promised to him, he was consoled. And since Jesus knew that it was very important to Peter to glorify his Divine Master, He wanted to predict to him the kind of suffering with which he would end his life.

Therefore, immediately after the three professions of love that He had made to him, He began to speak to him as follows: "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old, another, that is, the executioner, will gird you, that is, will bind you, and you will stretch out your hands, and he will carry you where you do not want." With these words, the Gospel says, He meant to signify by what death Peter would glorify God, namely by being bound to a cross and crowned with martyrdom. Peter, seeing that Jesus was giving him supreme authority and was predicting martyrdom only to him, was eager to ask what would become of his friend John and said: "And what about this man?" To which Jesus replied: "What is that to you? If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me." Then Peter adored the decrees of the Saviour and did not dare to ask any further questions on that subject.

Jesus Christ appeared many times to Saint Peter and the other Apostles; and one day He manifested Himself on a mountain where more than 500 disciples were present. On another occasion, after making known to them the supreme and absolute power that He had in Heaven and on earth, He conferred on St. Peter and all the Apostles the authority to forgive sins, saying: "As my Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Go, preach the Gospel to all creatures; teach them and baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved;

whoever does not believe will be condemned. I still have many things to say to you, which you cannot yet bear. But the Holy Spirit, whom I will send to you in a few days, will teach you all things. Do not lose heart. You will be brought before tribunals, before magistrates and kings. Do not worry about what you will answer; the Spirit of truth, whom the heavenly Father will send you in my name, will put the words in your mouth and will suggest to you all things. You, Oh Peter, and all of you my Apostles, do not think that I leave you orphans; no, I will be with you all the days until the end of the ages: *Et ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi.*"

He said many more things to His Apostles. Then, on the fortieth day after His Resurrection, recommending that they not depart from Jerusalem until after the coming of the Holy Spirit, He led them to the Mount of Olives. There He blessed them and began to lift Himself up high. At that moment, a shining cloud appeared that surrounded Him and took Him from their sight.

The Apostles were still gazing up at Heaven, as if caught in sweet ecstasy, when two Angels in human form, magnificently dressed, approached and said: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at Heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into Heaven, will return in the same way as you saw Him go into Heaven." Having said this, they disappeared; and that devout company left the Mount of Olives and returned to Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, according to the command of the Divine Saviour.

CHAPTER XII. St. Peter replaces Judas. – The coming of the Holy Spirit. – Miracle of tongues. *Year 33 of Jesus Christ.*

So far we have considered Peter only in his private life, but soon we will see him embark on a much more glorious career, after he has received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now let us observe how he began to exercise the authority of Supreme Pontiff, which he had been invested with by Jesus Christ.



After the Ascension of the Divine Master, St. Peter, the Apostles, and many other disciples withdrew to the upper room, which was a dwelling located on the highest part of Jerusalem, called Mount Zion. Here, numbering about 120 people, with Mary the Mother of Jesus, they spent their days in prayer, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

One day, while they were engaged in sacred functions, Peter stood up among them and, raising his hand to silence them, said: "Brothers, it is necessary that what the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of the prophet David concerning Judas, who was the guide of those who arrested the Divine Master, be fulfilled. He, like you, had been chosen for the same ministry, but he transgressed, and with the price of his iniquities, he bought a field. He hung himself, and bursting open, he spilled his guts on the ground. The fact became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and that field received the name of Aceldama, that is, field of blood. Now, it was written about him in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it; and let another take his office.'[\[15\]](#)' Therefore, it is necessary that among those who have been with us all the time that Jesus Christ dwelt among us, beginning from the Baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us, it is necessary, I say, that one of these be chosen to be with us a witness of His Resurrection for the work to which we are sent."

Everyone was silent at Peter's words, for they all regarded him as the head of the Church and elected by Jesus Christ to act in His stead on earth. Therefore, two were presented, namely Joseph, called Barsabbas (who was surnamed the Just), and Matthias. Recognising equal merit and equal virtue in both, the sacred electors entrusted the choice to God. Prostrating themselves, they began to pray as follows: "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show us which of the two you have chosen to take the place of Judas the transgressor." In that case, it was deemed good to use prayer and also lots to know the will of God. At present, the Church

no longer uses this means, having many other ways to recognise those who are called to the ministry of the altar. They then cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, who was numbered with the other eleven Apostles, thus filling the twelfth place that had remained vacant.

This is the first act of Pontifical authority that St. Peter exercised: authority not only of honour but of jurisdiction, which has been exercised at all times by his successor Popes.

We have seen in Peter a living faith, deep humility, ready obedience, fervent and generous charity, yet these beautiful qualities were still far from enabling him to exercise the high ministry to which he was destined. He had to overcome the obstinacy of the Jews, destroy idolatry, convert men given to all vices, and establish throughout the land the faith in a Crucified God. The conferral of this strength, which Peter needed for such a great undertaking, was reserved for a special grace to be infused through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which was to descend upon him, to enlighten his mind and inflame his heart with an unheard-of miracle.

This miraculous event is reported in the Sacred books as follows: it was the day of Pentecost, that is, the fiftieth after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the tenth since Peter was in the upper room in prayer with the other disciples, when suddenly at the third hour, around nine in the morning, a great noise like the sound of thunder accompanied by a strong wind was heard on Mount Zion. That wind filled the house where the disciples were, so that it was filled on every side. While everyone was reflecting on the cause of that noise, flames appeared that, like tongues of fire, came to rest on the head of each of those present. Those flames were a symbol of the courage and inflamed charity with which the Apostles would undertake the preaching of the Gospel.

At that moment, Peter became a new man. He found himself illuminated to such an extent that he knew the highest mysteries, and he felt within himself a courage and strength such that the greatest undertakings seemed nothing to him.

On that day, a great feast was being celebrated in Jerusalem by the Jews, and many had come from various parts of the world. Some of them spoke Latin, others Greek, others Egyptian, Arabic, Syriac, others still Persian, and so on.

Now, upon hearing the noise of the strong wind, a great multitude of that people of many languages and nations ran towards the upper room to find out what had happened. At that sight, the Apostles came out and approached them to speak.

And here a miracle never heard of before took place. In fact, the Apostles, humanly unrefined, in such a way that they barely knew the language of the land, began to speak of the greatness of God in the languages of all those who had come. Such a fact filled the listeners with great astonishment, who, not knowing how to explain it, went saying to one another: "What can this be?"

#### CHAPTER XIII. Peter's first sermon. *Year 33 of Jesus Christ.*

While the majority admired the intervention of divine power, there was no shortage of malicious people who, used to despise everything holy, no longer knowing what to say, went about calling the Apostles drunkards. Truly ridiculous nonsense; for drunkenness does not make one speak an unknown language, rather it makes one forget or criticise one's own language. It was then that Saint Peter, filled with holy fervour, began to preach Jesus Christ for the first time.

In the name of all the other Apostles, he stepped forward before the multitude, raised his hand, commanded silence, and began to speak saying: "Men of Judea and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, open your ears to my words and you will be enlightened about this matter. These men are not at all drunk as you think, for it is only the third hour of the morning, at which we are accustomed to be fasting. Quite another is the cause of what you see. Today the prophecy of the prophet Joel has been fulfilled in us, who said: 'During the final days, says the Lord, I will pour out my Spirit over men and women; and your sons and your daughters shall

prophecy. Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And in those days I will pour out my Spirit on my servants and my maidservants, and they shall prophecy, and I will show wonders on Heaven and earth. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

"Now," continued Peter, "listen, oh children of Jacob: that Lord, in whose name whoever believes will be saved, is that same Jesus of Nazareth, that great man whom God bore witness to with a multitude of miracles that He performed, as you yourselves have seen. You killed that man by the hand of the wicked, and thus, without knowing it, you served the decrees of God, who wanted to save the world with His death. God, however, raised Him from the dead, as the prophet David had predicted with these words: 'You will not leave me in the grave, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption.'

"Notice," added Peter, "notice, Oh Jews, that David did not mean to speak of Himself, for you well know that He is dead and His tomb remains among us to this day, but being a prophet and knowing that God had promised Him with an oath that from His descendants the Messiah would be born, He also prophesied His resurrection, saying that He would not be left in the grave and that His body would not see corruption. Therefore, it is this Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead, of whom we are witnesses. Yes, we have seen Him returned to life, we have touched Him and have eaten with Him.

"Therefore, having been exalted by the power of the Father in Heaven and having received from Him the authority to send the Holy Spirit, according to His promise, He has just sent upon us this Divine Spirit, of whose power you see in us such a manifest proof. That Jesus ascended to heaven, David himself says with these words: 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.' Now you well know that David did not ascend to heaven to reign. It is Jesus Christ who ascended to heaven: to Him, therefore, and not to David, those words were

appropriate. Therefore, let all the people of Israel know that that Jesus whom you crucified was made by God Lord of all things, king and Saviour of His people, and no one can be saved without having faith in Him.”

Such preaching by Peter should have stirred the hearts of his listeners, to whom he reproached the enormous crime committed against the person of the Divine Saviour. But it was God who spoke through the mouth of His minister, and therefore his preaching produced wonderful effects. Thus, agitated as if by an internal fire, the effect of God’s grace, from all sides they cried out with truly contrite hearts: “What shall we do?” St. Peter, observing that the grace of the Lord was working in their hearts and that they already believed in Jesus Christ, said to them: “Repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ; so you will obtain the remission of sins and receive the Holy Spirit.”

The Apostle continued to instruct that multitude, encouraging all to trust in the mercy and goodness of God, who desires the salvation of men. The fruit of this first sermon corresponded to the fervent charity of the preacher. About 3,000 people converted to the faith of Jesus Christ and were baptised by the Apostles. Thus, the words of the Saviour began to be fulfilled when he told Peter that in the future he would no longer be a fisherman of fish, but a fisherman of men. Saint Augustine assures that Saint Stephen the protomartyr was converted in this sermon.

CHAPTER XIV. St. Peter heals a lame man. – His second sermon. *Year 33 Jesus Christ.*

A little after this sermon, at the ninth hour, that is, at three in the afternoon, Peter and his friend John, as if to thank God for the benefits received, were going together to the temple to pray. Arriving at a gate of the temple called “Specious” albeit “Beautiful”, they found a man lame from both feet since birth. Unable to stand, he was carried there to live by begging from those who entered the holy place. That unfortunate man, when he saw the two Apostles

near him, asked them for charity, as he did with everyone. Peter, inspired by God, looked at him intently and said, "Look at us." He looked, and in the hope of receiving something, he did not blink. Then Peter said, "Listen, good man, I have neither gold nor silver to give you; what I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Then he took him by the hand to lift him up, as he had seen the Divine Master do in similar cases. At that moment, the lame man felt his legs strengthen, his nerves become firm, and he gained strength like any other healthy man. Feeling healed, he jumped up, began to walk, and, leaping for joy and praising God, entered the temple with the two Apostles. All the people, who had witnessed the event and saw the lame man walking by himself, could not help but recognise that healing as a true miracle. The language of deeds is more effective than that of words. Therefore, the multitude, having learned that it was St. Peter who restored health to that miserable man, gathered around him and John in great numbers, all desiring to see with their own eyes someone who could perform such wonderful works.

This is the first miracle that, after the Ascension of Jesus Christ, was performed by the Apostles, and it was fitting that Peter should do it, as he held the highest dignity in the Church among them all. But Peter, seeing himself surrounded by so many people, considered it a good opportunity to give glory to God and to glorify Jesus Christ at the same time, in whose name the miracle had been performed.

"Children of Israel," he said to them, "why are you so amazed at this? Why do you fix your eyes on us, as if by our own power we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied before Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go as innocent. You, therefore, had the audacity to deny the Holy and the Just, and you asked for a murderer, Barabbas, to be released instead of him, and denying the Just, the Holy, and the author of life, you had Him killed. But God raised Him

from the dead, and we are witnesses of this, for we have seen Him multiple times. We have touched Him, and we have eaten with Him. Now, by virtue of His name, through faith in Him, this lame man, whom you see and know, has been healed. It is Jesus who has restored him to perfect health in front of all of you. Now I know that your sin and that of your leaders, although it has no sufficient excuse, was committed in ignorance. But God, who had foretold by His prophets that the Messiah would suffer such things, allowed you to see this without wanting to, so that the decree of God's mercy has been fulfilled. Therefore, repent and turn back, so that your sins may be blotted out and you may present yourselves confidently for your salvation before the judgment seat of this same Jesus Christ whom I have preached to you, and by whom we all must be judged.

"These things," Peter continued, "were foretold by God. Therefore, believe in His prophets and among them all, believe in Moses, who is the greatest of them. What does he say? 'The Lord,' says Moses, 'will raise up a prophet like me, and you will believe in Him in everything He tells you. Anyone who does not listen to what this prophet says will be destroyed from among His people.'

"This was said by Moses and he was speaking of Jesus. After Moses, starting from Samuel, all the prophets who came foretold this day and the things that have happened. Such things and the great blessings that are foretold belong to you. You are the children of the prophets, of the promises, and of the covenants that God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, who is the root of the descendants of the righteous: 'In you and in your offspring, all the generations of the world will be blessed.' He was speaking of the Redeemer, of that Jesus, Son of God, descended from Abraham; that Jesus whom God raised from the dead and who commands us to preach His word to you before we preach it to any other people, bringing you through us the promised blessing, so that you may turn from your sins and have eternal life."

After this second sermon of St. Peter, there were

numerous conversions to the faith. Five thousand men asked for Baptism, so the number of converts in just two sermons already amounted to eight thousand people, not counting women and children.

CHAPTER XV. Peter is imprisoned with John and is freed.

The enemy of humankind, who saw his kingdom being destroyed, sought to incite persecution against the Church at its very beginning. While Peter was preaching, the priests, the magistrates of the temple, and the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the dead, came upon them. They were extremely furious because Peter was preaching to the people about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Impatient and filled with rage, they interrupted Peter's sermon, laid hands on him, and led him and John to prison, intending to discuss with each other the next day. But fearing the protests of the people, they did them no harm.

When day came, all the leaders of the city gathered, that is, all the supreme magistrates of the nation convened to judge the two Apostles, as if they were the most wicked and formidable men in the world. In the midst of that imposing assembly, Peter and John were brought in, along with the lame man they had healed.

They were solemnly asked this question: "By what power and in whose name have you healed this lame man?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, with a courage truly worthy of the head of the Church, began to speak in the following manner: "Rulers of the people, and you teachers of the law, listen. If today we are being accused and put on trial for a good deed, which is the healing of this sick man, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man, whom you see here in your presence, healthy and whole, has received his health in the name of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth, the same one whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead to life. This is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has now become the cornerstone. No one can be saved except through Him, nor is



there any other name under Heaven given to men by which we can be saved.”

This frank and resolute speech of the prince of the Apostles made a deep impression on the hearts of all those who composed the assembly, so that, admiring Peter’s courage and innocence, they did not know which side to take. They wanted to punish them, but the great credit that the miracle performed a little earlier had earned them throughout the city made them fear dire consequences.

However, wanting to make some resolution, they brought the two Apostles out of the council chamber and agreed to prohibit them, under severe penalties, from ever speaking again in the future about past matters, nor ever mentioning Jesus of Nazareth again, so that even the memory of Him would be lost. But it is written that the efforts of men are futile when they are contrary to the will of God.

Therefore, when the two Apostles were brought back into the council, as they heard that severe threat being imposed, far from being frightened, with greater firmness and steadfastness than before, Peter replied: “Now, decide for yourselves whether it is right and just to obey you rather than God. We cannot help but speak about what we have heard and seen.”

So those judges, even more confused, not knowing what to answer or what to do, resolved to send them away this time without punishment, prohibiting them only from preaching Jesus of Nazareth anymore.

As soon as they were set free, Peter and John immediately went to find the other disciples, who were greatly troubled by their imprisonment. When they heard the account of what had happened, each one gave thanks to God, praying Him to give them strength and courage to preach the Divine Word in the face of any danger.

If Christians today had all the courage of the faithful of the early days and, overcoming all human respect, boldly professed their faith, certainly there would not be so much contempt for our holy religion, and perhaps many who seek

to mock religion and its sacred ministers would be forced to venerate it along with its ministers.

CHAPTER XVI. Life of the early Christians. – The case of Ananias and Sapphira. – St. Peter's miracles. *Year 34 of Jesus Christ.*

Through the sermons of St. Peter and the zeal of the other Apostles, the number of the faithful had greatly increased.

On the appointed days, they gathered together for sacred functions. And Sacred Scripture precisely states that those faithful were persevering in prayer, in listening to the Word of God, and in frequently receiving Holy Communion, so that among them all they formed one heart and one soul to love and serve God the Creator.

Many, desiring to completely detach their hearts from earthly goods and think only of Heaven, sold their possessions and brought the proceeds to the feet of the Apostles, so that they could use them as they deemed best for the benefit of the poor. Sacred Scripture makes a special commendation of a certain Joseph, nicknamed Barnabas, who later became a faithful companion of St. Paul the Apostle. He sold a field he owned and generously brought the entire price to the Apostles. Many, following his example, competed to show their detachment from earthly things, so that soon those faithful formed one family, of which Peter was the visible head. Among them, there were no poor, because the rich shared their possessions with the needy.

However, even in those happy times, there were fraudulent individuals who, guided by a spirit of hypocrisy, attempted to deceive St. Peter and lie to the Holy Spirit. This had the most disastrous consequences. Here is how the sacred text presents the terrible event.

Certainly, Ananias and his wife Sapphira made a promise to God to sell a piece of their property and, like the other faithful, bring the proceeds to the Apostles so that they could distribute it according to various needs. They

faithfully executed the first part of the promise, but the love of gold led them to violate the second.

They were free to keep the field or the price, but having made the promise, they were obliged to keep it, since things consecrated to God or the Church become sacred and inviolable.

Therefore, having agreed among themselves, they kept back a portion of the price for themselves and brought the other part to St. Peter with the intention of making him believe that this was the entire sum obtained from the sale. Peter had a special revelation of the deception and, as soon as Ananias appeared before him, without giving him time to say a word, in an authoritative and grave tone, he began to rebuke him: "Why have you let yourself be seduced by the spirit of Satan to lie to the Holy Spirit, keeping back a portion of the price of that field? Was it not in your power before selling it? And after selling it, was not the entire sum at your disposal? Why then have you conceived this wicked plan? You must know that you have not lied to men, but to God." At that tone of voice, at those words, Ananias, as if struck by lightning, fell dead on the spot.

As three hours passed, Sapphira came to present herself to Peter, knowing nothing of her husband's mournful end. The Apostle showed greater compassion towards her and wanted to give her a chance for repentance by asking her if that sum was the entire product of the sale of that field. The woman, with the same boldness and temerity as Ananias, confirmed her husband's lie with another lie. Therefore, rebuked by St. Peter with the same zeal and the same force, she too fell dead on the spot and breathed her last breath. It is hoped that such a terrible temporal punishment will have helped them avoid eternal punishment in the afterlife. Such exemplary punishment was necessary to instil reverence for Christianity in all those who came to the faith and to procure respect for the Prince of the Apostles, as well as to give an example of the terrible way in which God punishes the perjurer and at the same time teaches us to be faithful to the promises

made to God.

This event, along with the many miracles that Peter performed, caused the fervour among the faithful to double and the fame of his virtues to spread.

All the Apostles performed miracles. A sick person who had been in contact with any of the Apostles was immediately healed. St. Peter, however, stood out above all others. Such was the trust that everyone had in him and in his virtues that from all parts, even from distant lands, they came to Jerusalem to witness his miracles. Sometimes it happened that he was surrounded by such a multitude of lame and sick people that it was no longer possible to approach him. Therefore, they brought the sick on beds into the public squares and streets, so that, as St. Peter passed by, at least the shadow of his body would touch them: this was enough to heal every kind of illness. St. Augustine assures that a dead person, upon whom Peter's shadow passed, immediately rose from the dead.

The Holy Fathers see in this event the fulfilment of the Redeemer's promise to His Apostles, saying that they would perform even greater miracles than those He himself deemed appropriate to perform during His mortal life[\[16\]](#).

CHAPTER XVII. St. Peter imprisoned again. – He is freed by an angel. *Year 34 of Jesus Christ.*

The Church of Jesus Christ was gaining new followers every day. The multitude of miracles combined with the holy life of those early Christians caused people of every rank, age, and condition to rush in crowds to ask for Baptism and thus secure their eternal salvation. But the high priest and the Sadducees were consumed with anger and jealousy. Not knowing what means to use to prevent the spread of the Gospel, they took Peter and the other Apostles and locked them in prison. But God, to demonstrate once again that the plans of men are vain when they are contrary to the will of Heaven, and that He can do what He wants and when He wants, sent an angel that very night who, opening the prison doors, led them out,

saying to them: "In the name of God, go and boldly preach in the temple, in the presence of the people, the words of eternal life. Do not fear either the commands or the threats of men."

The Apostles, having seen themselves so miraculously favoured and defended by God, according to the order received, went early in the morning to the temple to preach and teach the people. The high priest, who wanted to severely punish the Apostles to give solemnity to the trial, convened the Sanhedrin, the elders, the scribes, and all those who had some authority over the people. Then he sent to bring the Apostles so that they could be led there from prison.

The ministers, or the henchmen, obeyed the orders given. They went, opened the prison, entered, and found no one inside. They immediately returned to the assembly and, filled with wonder, announced the matter as follows: "We found the prison closed and guarded with all diligence. The guards were faithfully at their posts, but when we opened it, we found no one." Hearing this, they no longer knew which way to turn.

While they were consulting on what they should deliberate, someone came saying: "Do you not know? Those men whom you put in prison yesterday are now in the temple preaching with more fervour than before." Then they felt more than ever burned with rage against the Apostles. However, the fear of making enemies of the people held them back, for they would risk being stoned.

The temple Prefect offered to settle the matter himself with the best possible expedient. He went where the preachers were and, with good manners, without using any violence, invited them to come with him and led them into the midst of the assembly.

The high priest, addressing them, said: "It has only been a few days since we strictly prohibited you from speaking about this Jesus of Nazareth, and in the meantime, you have filled the city with this new doctrine. It seems that you want to bring upon us the death of that man and make us hated by all the people as guilty of that blood. How dare you

do this?"

"We think we have done excellently," replied Peter also on behalf of the other Apostles, "because we must rather obey God than men. What we preach is a truth put in our mouths by God, and we do not fear to tell it to you in this venerable assembly." Here Peter repeated what he had said before about the life, passion, and death of the Saviour, always concluding that it was impossible for them to silence those things which, according to the orders received from God, they had to preach.

At those words of the Apostles, pronounced with such firmness, having nothing to oppose, they were raging with anger and were already thinking of having them killed. But they were dissuaded by a certain Gamaliel, who was one of the doctors of the law gathered there. He, having considered everything well, had the Apostles taken out for a short time, then, standing up, said in the full assembly: "Oh Israelites, pay close attention to what you are about to do regarding these men, for if this is the work of men, it will fall by itself, as happened with so many others. But if the work is of God, can you perhaps prevent it and destroy it, or will you oppose God?" The whole assembly quieted down and followed his advice.

Having then brought the Apostles back in, first they had them beaten, then they ordered them that they should absolutely not speak any more of Jesus Christ. But they left the council full of joy, because they had been deemed worthy to suffer something for the name of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XVIII. Election of the seven deacons. – St. Peter resists the persecution in Jerusalem. – He goes to Samaria. – His first confrontation with Simon Magus. *Year 35 of Jesus Christ.*

The multitude of believers embracing the faith occupied the zeal of the Apostles so much that they, having to attend to the preaching of the Divine Word, to the instruction of the new converts, to prayer, and to the administration of the Sacraments, could no longer occupy themselves with

temporal affairs. This caused discontent among some Christians, as if they were held in little consideration or despised in the distribution of aid. Informed of this, St. Peter and the other Apostles resolved to remedy it.

They therefore convened a large assembly of believers and, making them understand how they should not neglect the things of their sacred ministry to attend to temporal aid, proposed the election of seven deacons, who, known for their zeal and virtue, would attend to the administration of certain sacred actions, such as the administration of Baptism, of the Eucharist; and at the same time take care of the distribution of alms and other material things.

Everyone approved that proposal. Then St. Peter and the other Apostles laid hands on the newly elected and assigned each to their respective offices. With the addition of these seven deacons, in addition to providing for temporal needs, the number of evangelical workers also multiplied, leading to greater conversions. Among the seven deacons was the famous Saint Stephen, who, for his courage in upholding the truth of the Gospel, was killed by stoning outside the city. He is commonly referred to as the Protomartyr, that is, the first martyr, who after Jesus Christ gave his life for the faith. The death of Saint Stephen was the beginning of a great persecution raised by the Jews against all the followers of Jesus Christ, which forced the faithful to scatter here and there in various cities and different countries.

Peter and the other Apostles remained in Jerusalem both to confirm the faithful in the faith and to maintain a living relationship with those who were dispersed in other countries. In order to avoid the fury of the Jews, he kept himself hidden, known only to the followers of the Gospel, going out from his secret dwelling whenever he saw the need. Meanwhile, an edict from Emperor Tiberius Augustus in favour of the Christians and the conversion of St. Paul caused the persecution to cease. And it was then that it became known how the providence of God does not allow any evil without bringing

forth good, for He used the persecution to spread the Gospel in other places. And it can be said that each believer was a preacher of Jesus Christ in all those countries where he went to take refuge. Among those who were forced to flee from Jerusalem was one of the seven deacons named Philip.

He went to the city of Samaria, where through preaching and miracles he made many conversions. When the news reached Jerusalem that an extraordinary number of Samaritans had come to the faith, the Apostles resolved to send some there to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and to supplement those whom the Deacons did not have the authority to administer. Therefore, Peter and John were assigned for that mission: Peter because, as head of the Church, he would receive that foreign nation into its bosom and unite the Samaritans with the Jews, while John, then as a special friend of St. Peter, and distinguished among others for miracles and holiness.

There was in Samaria a certain Simon of Gitta, nicknamed the Magician, that is, sorcerer. He, by means of tricks and enchantments, had deceived many, boasting that he was something extraordinary. Blasphemously claiming, he said that he was the great power of God. The people seemed to go mad for him and ran after him, acclaiming him as if he were a divine being. One day, having been present at Philip's preaching, he was moved and asked for Baptism to also perform the wonders that the faithful generally performed after receiving this Sacrament.

When Peter and John arrived there, they began to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, laying hands as bishops do today. Simon, seeing that with the laying on of hands they also received the gift of tongues and the ability to perform miracles, thought it would be a great fortune for him if he could perform the same things. Therefore, approaching Peter, he took out a bag of money and offered it to him, begging him to also grant him the power to perform miracles and to give the Holy Spirit to those to whom he would lay hands.



St. Peter, greatly indignant at such impiety, turned to him: "Wicked one," he said, "may your money perish with you, for you have believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be bought with money. Hurry to repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to God that He may grant you forgiveness."

Simon, fearing that what had happened to Ananias and Sapphira would happen to him, all frightened replied: "It is true: pray also for me that such a threat does not come upon me." These words seem to show that he was repentant, but he was not. He did not ask the Apostles to implore mercy from God for him, but to keep the scourge away from him. Once the fear of punishment passed, he returned to being what he was before, that is, a magician, seducer, friend of the devil. We will see him in other confrontations with Peter.

The two Apostles Peter and John, after administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to the new believers of Samaria and having strengthened them in the faith they had just received, gave them the greeting of peace and departed from that city. They passed through many places preaching Jesus Christ, considering every effort little as long as it contributed to spreading the Gospel and winning souls to Heaven.

CHAPTER XIX. St. Peter establishes the chair of Antioch and returns to Jerusalem. – He receives a visit from St. Paul. *Year 36 of Jesus Christ.*

St. Peter, having returned from Samaria, stayed for some time in Jerusalem, then went to preach the grace of the Lord in various countries. While with zeal worthy of the prince of the Apostles he was visiting the churches that were being founded here and there, he learned that Simon the Magician from Samaria had gone to Antioch to spread his impostures. He then resolved to go to that city to dispel the errors of that enemy of God and men. Upon arriving in that capital, he immediately began to preach the Gospel with great zeal, and succeeded in converting such a number of people to

the faith that the believers began to be called Christians there, that is, followers of Jesus Christ.

Among the illustrious figures who converted through the preaching of St. Peter was St. Evodius. Upon Peter's first arrival, he invited him to his home, and the holy Apostle became fond of him, provided him with the necessary instruction, and, seeing him adorned with the necessary virtues, consecrated him as a priest, then bishop, so that he could take his place in times of his absence, and so that he would succeed him later in that episcopal seat.

When Peter wanted to begin preaching in that city, he encountered serious obstacles from the governor, who was a prince named Theophilus. He had the holy Apostle imprisoned as the inventor of a religion contrary to the religion of the state. He therefore wanted to come to a dispute about the things he preached, and hearing him say that Jesus Christ, out of love for men, died on the Cross, he said: "This man is mad, and he should no longer be listened to." In order to be regarded as such, he had his hair cut in half, leaving a circle around his head like a crown. What was then done in contempt, now the clergy use in honour, and it is called clerical or tonsure, which recalls the crown of thorns placed on the head of the Divine Saviour.

When Peter saw himself treated in this way, he prayed the governor to deign to listen to him once more. When this was granted to him, Peter said: "You, Oh Theophilus, are scandalised to hear me say that the God I adore died on the Cross. I had already told you that He became man, and being man, you should not be so surprised that He died, for dying is proper to man. Know, moreover, that He died on the Cross of His own will, because with His death He wanted to give life to all men, making peace between His Eternal Father and mankind. But just as I tell you that He died, so I assure you that He rose again by His own power, having first raised many other dead." Theophilus, hearing that He had raised the dead, calmed down and, with an air of wonder, added: "You say that your God raised the dead. Now, if you in His name will raise my son,

who died a few days ago, I will believe what you preach to me.” The Apostle accepted the invitation, went to the tomb of the young man, and, in the presence of a large crowd, prayed and in the name of Jesus Christ called him back to life. This caused the governor and the whole city to believe in Jesus Christ[\[17\]](#).

Theophilus soon became a fervent Christian and, as a sign of esteem and reverence towards St. Peter, offered him his house so that he could use it as he wished. That building was transformed into a church, where the people gathered to assist at the divine sacrifice and to hear the sermons of the holy Apostle. In order to be able to listen to him more comfortably and profitably, they raised a chair there from which the Saint gave the sacred lessons.

It is good to note here that St. Peter, for a period of three years, as long as he could, resided in Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, where the Jews could more easily have relations with him. In the thirty-sixth year of Jesus Christ, both due to the persecution in Jerusalem and to prepare the way for the conversion of the Gentiles, he came to establish his seat in Antioch. That is, he established the city of Antioch as his ordinary residence and as a centre of communion with the other Christian Churches.

Peter governed this Church of Antioch for seven years, until, inspired by God, he transferred his chair to Rome, as we will recount in due time.

The establishment of the holy See in Antioch is particularly narrated by Eusebius of Caesarea, St. Jerome, St. Leo the Great, and a large number of ecclesiastical writers. The Catholic Church celebrates this event with a particular solemnity on February 22.

While St. Peter was in Antioch, he went to Jerusalem, where he received a visit that was certainly a great consolation to him. St. Paul, who had been converted to the faith with a stupendous miracle, although he had been instructed by Jesus Christ and sent by Him to preach the Gospel, still wanted to go to St. Peter to venerate in him as

head of the Church and to receive from him the advice and instructions that would be appropriate. St. Paul stayed in Jerusalem with the prince of the Apostles for fifteen days. That time was enough for him, since in addition to the revelations received from Jesus Christ, he had spent his life studying the holy Scriptures and, after his conversion, had tirelessly occupied himself in the meditation and preaching of the word of God.

CHAPTER XX. St. Peter visits several Churches. – He heals Eneas the paralytic. – He raises the deceased Tabitha. *Year 38 of Jesus Christ.*

Saint Peter had been entrusted by the Divine Saviour to preserve all Christians in the faith. In addition, since many Churches were being founded here and there by the Apostles, Deacons, and other disciples, Saint Peter, in order to maintain the unity of faith and to exercise the supreme authority conferred upon him by the Saviour while he held his ordinary residence in Antioch, personally went to visit the churches that had already been founded and were being founded at that time. In certain places, he confirmed the faithful in the faith, elsewhere he comforted those who had suffered in the past persecution. Here he administered the Sacrament of Confirmation, and everywhere he ordained pastors and bishops, who, after his departure, would continue to care for the churches and the flock of Jesus Christ.

While passing from one city to another, he arrived at the saints who lived in Lydda, a city about twenty miles from Jerusalem. The Christians of the early days, for the virtuous and mortified life they led, were called saints, and with this name the Christians of today, who, like them, are called to holiness, should be able to call themselves.

Upon reaching the gates of the city of Lydda, Peter encountered a paralytic named Aeneas. He had been struck by paralysis and was completely immobile in his limbs, and for eight years he had not moved from his little bed. Peter, as soon as he saw him, without being asked at all, said to him:

"Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed." Aeneas stood up healthy and strong as if he had never been ill. Many were present at this miracle, which quickly spread throughout the city and the nearby region called Sharon. All those inhabitants, moved by the divine goodness that visibly showed signs of its infinite power, believed in Jesus Christ and entered the fold of the Church.

A short distance from Lydda was Joppa, another city located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Here lived a Christian widow named Tabitha, who, for her almsgiving and many works of charity, was universally called the mother of the poor. It happened in those days that she fell ill and, after a brief illness, died, leaving everyone in deep sorrow. According to the custom of those times, the women washed her body and laid it on the terrace to prepare for burial in due time.

Now, due to the proximity of Lydda, the news of the miracle performed in the healing of Aeneas had spread in Joppa, and two men were sent there to ask Peter to come and see the deceased Tabitha. Upon hearing of the death of that virtuous disciple of Jesus Christ and the desire of the Christians for him to go there to raise her from the dead, Peter immediately set out with them. Upon arriving in Joppa, the disciples led him to the terrace and, showing him the body of Tabitha, told him of the many good works of that holy woman and begged him to raise her.

The poor and the widows, upon hearing of Peter's arrival, ran weeping to ask him to restore to them their good mother. "Look," said one, "this garment was made by her charity"; "this tunic, the shoes of that boy," others added, "are all things given by her." At the sight of so many people weeping, of so many charitable works being recounted, Peter was moved. He stood up and, turning to the body, said: "Tabitha, I command you in the name of God, rise." At that moment, Tabitha opened her eyes and, having seen Peter, sat up and began to speak with him. Peter, taking her by the hand, raised her up and, calling the disciples, returned to them

their longed-for mother, healthy and safe. There was great rejoicing throughout the house. From all sides they wept for joy, feeling that they had regained a treasure in that one woman, who truly was the consolation of all. From this event, let the poor learn to be grateful to those who offer them alms. Let the rich learn what it means to be merciful and generous towards the poor.

CHAPTER XXI. God reveals the calling of the Gentiles to St. Peter. – He goes to Caesarea to baptise the family of Cornelius the Centurion. *Year 39 of Jesus Christ.*

God had often made it known through His prophets that at the coming of the Messiah all nations would be called to the knowledge of the true God.

The same Divine Saviour had given explicit command to His Apostles, saying: "Go, teach all nations." The same preachers of the Gospel had already received some non-Jews into the faith, as they had done with the Eunuch of Queen Candace and with Theophilus, Governor of Antioch. But these were particular cases, and the Apostles until then had preached the Gospel almost exclusively to the Jews, waiting for a special notice from the Lord of the time when they should without exception receive the Gentiles and pagans into the faith. Such a revelation was certainly to be made to Saint Peter, the head of the Church. Here is how the sacred text presents this memorable event.

In Caesarea, a city of Palestine, there lived a certain Cornelius, a centurion, or officer of a cohort, a body of 100 soldiers, which belonged to the Italic legion, so called because it was composed of Italian soldiers.

The Sacred Scripture praises him, saying that he was a religious man and God-fearing. These words mean that he was a Gentile, but that he had abandoned the idolatry in which he was born, worshiped the true God, gave many alms and prayers, and lived religiously according to the dictates of right reason.

God, infinitely merciful, who, with His grace,

never fails to come to the aid of those who do what they can on their part, sent an angel to Cornelius to instruct him on what he should do. This good soldier was praying when he saw an angel appear before him in the form of a man dressed in white. "Cornelius," said the angel. Filled with fear, he fixed his gaze on him, saying: "Who are you, Oh Lord; what do you want?" Then the angel said: "God has remembered your alms. Your prayers have reached His throne, and wishing to fulfil your desires, He has sent me to show you the way of salvation. Therefore, send to Joppa and look for a certain Simon surnamed Peter. He dwells with another Simon, a tanner, whose house is near the sea. From this Peter you will learn all that is necessary for your salvation." Cornelius did not delay to obey the voice of Heaven and, calling to him two servants and a soldier, all of whom feared God, he told them of the vision and commanded that they immediately go to Joppa for the purpose indicated to him by the angel.

They set out immediately and, walking all night, arrived in Joppa at noon the following day, since the distance between these two cities is about 40 miles. Just before they arrived, St. Peter also had a wonderful revelation, with which it was confirmed that even the Gentiles were called to the faith. Tired from his labours, the holy Apostle that day had come to the house of his host to rest, and, as usual, he went first to a room on the upper floor to pray. While he was praying, he seemed to see Heaven opened and from the midst a certain vessel descending to the ground like a large sheet, which, held at its four corners, formed like a great container full of all sorts of four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds, all of which, according to the law of Moses, were considered unclean, that is, they could not be eaten or offered to God.

At the same time, he heard a voice saying: "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." Astonished at that command, the Apostle replied: "Never let it be that I eat unclean animals, from which I have always abstained." The voice added: "Do not call unclean what God has purified." After the same vision had been repeated to him three times, that mysterious vessel was lifted

up to Heaven and disappeared.

The Holy Fathers recognise in these unclean animals a figure of sinners and all those who, entangled in vice and error, are purified and received into grace through the blood of Jesus Christ.

While Peter was pondering what that vision could mean, the three messengers arrived. At that moment, God made him know them and commanded him to go down to meet them, to associate with them, and to go with them without any fear. He then went down and, seeing them, said: "Here I am, I am the one you seek. What is the reason for your coming?"

Upon hearing the vision of Cornelius and the reason for their journey, he immediately understood the meaning of that mysterious sheet. Therefore, he welcomed them kindly and made them stay with him that night. The next morning, accompanied by six disciples, he left Joppa with the messengers, and in a group of ten, they set out for Caesarea.

After two days, Peter, with all his company, arrived in that city where the centurion was waiting for him with great anxiety. To honour his guest even more, he had gathered his relatives and friends so that they too could partake of the heavenly blessings that he hoped to obtain from Heaven upon Peter's arrival. When, according to God's order, the good centurion sent for Peter to hear from him the divine will, he must certainly have formed a great idea of him, considering him a sublime person and not like other men. Therefore, as Peter entered his house, he came to meet him and threw himself at his feet in an act of adoration. Peter, full of humility, immediately raised him up, informing him that he was, like him, a mere man. Continuing to speak, they entered the place of assembly.

There, in the presence of all, Peter recounted the order received from God to converse with the Gentiles and to no longer judge them as abominable and profane. "Now I am here with you," he concluded; "therefore tell me what is the reason you have called me." Cornelius obeyed Peter's invitation, stood up, and recounted what had happened to him four days



earlier, declaring that he and all those gathered there were very ready to carry out whatever he commanded them by divine commission. Then Peter, explaining the character of the Apostle of the Lord, a faithful steward of religion and faith, began to instruct that honourable assembly in the main mysteries of the Gospel.

Peter was continuing his discourse when the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon Cornelius and his family, and in a tangible way communicated to them the gift of tongues, so that they began to magnify God, singing His praises. St. Peter, seeing almost the same miracle occurring there as had happened in the upper room of Jerusalem, exclaimed: "Is there anyone who can prevent us from baptising these, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" Then, turning to his disciples, he ordered that they baptise them all. The family of Cornelius was the first in Rome and Italy to embrace the faith.

St. Peter, after having baptised them all, delayed his departure from Caesarea. He stayed for some time to satisfy the pious requests of Cornelius and all those newly baptised who were insistently asking him for this. Peter took advantage of that time to preach the Gospel in that city, and such was the fruit that he resolved to assign a pastor to that multitude of faithful. This was St. Zacchaeus, who is mentioned in the Gospel and who was therefore consecrated the first Bishop of Caesarea[\[18\]](#).

This event, namely the admission of the Gentiles to the faith, caused a certain jealousy among the faithful of Jerusalem, nor were there those who publicly disapproved of what St. Peter had done. For this reason, he deemed it good to go to that city, to disillusion the deluded and to make known that what he had done was by God's order. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, some presented themselves to him, speaking boldly to him: "Why have you gone to uncircumcised men and eaten with them?" Peter, in the presence of all the gathered faithful, without taking account of that question, gave them the reason for what he had done, starting from the vision he had in Joppa

of the vessel filled with all sorts of unclean animals, of the order received from God to eat of them, of the repugnance he showed to obey for fear of contradicting the law, and of the voice that was heard again not to call unclean what had been purified by God. Then he detailed what had happened in the house of Cornelius and how, in the presence of many, the Holy Spirit had descended. Then that whole assembly, recognising the voice of the Lord in that of Peter, calmed down and praised God for having extended the limits of His mercy.

CHAPTER XXII. Herod has St. James the Greater beheaded and St. Peter put in prison. – But he is freed by an Angel. – Death of Herod. *Year 41 of Jesus Christ.*

While the Word of God, preached with such zeal by the Apostles and the disciples, was producing fruits of eternal life among the Jews and the Gentiles, Judea was governed by Herod Agrippa, the nephew of that Herod who had commanded the massacre of the innocents.

Dominated by a spirit of ambition and vanity, he desperately desired to win the affection of the people. The Jews, especially those with some authority, took advantage of this propensity to incite him to persecute the Church and seek the applause of the wicked Jews in the blood of Christians. He began by having the Apostle St. James imprisoned, and then condemned him to the gallows. This was St. James the Greater, brother of St. John the Evangelist, a faithful friend of Peter, who received many special signs of goodwill from the Saviour.

This courageous Apostle, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, preached the Gospel in Judea. Then (as tradition narrates) he went to Spain, where he converted some to the faith. Upon returning to Palestine, among others, he converted a certain Hermogenes, a renowned man. This greatly displeased Herod and served as a pretext to have him imprisoned. Brought before the courts, he showed such firmness in responding and confessing Jesus Christ that the judge was astonished. His own accuser, moved by such constancy, renounced Judaism and

publicly declared himself a Christian, and as such was also condemned to death. While both were being led to execution, he turned to St. James and asked him for forgiveness for what he had said and done against him. The holy Apostle, giving him a loving glance, said to him, "*pax tecum*" (peace be with you). Then he embraced and kissed him, protesting that he forgave him with all his heart, indeed that he loved him as a brother. It is believed that the sign of peace and forgiveness, which is customary among Christians, especially in the sacrifice of the holy Mass, originated from this.

After this, those two generous confessors of the faith had their heads cut off and went to join each other eternally in Heaven.

Such a death greatly saddened the faithful, but it greatly rejoiced the Jews, who thought that with the death of the leaders of the religion, they would put an end to the religion itself. Herod, seeing that the death of St. James pleased the Jews, thought to procure for them a sweeter spectacle by having St. Peter imprisoned, to then leave him at the mercy of their blind fury. And since it was the week of unleavened bread, which for the Jews is a time of joy and preparation for Passover, he did not want to darken the public joy with the execution of a man presumed guilty. Therefore, loaded with chains, he had him led between two guards and ordered that he be carefully guarded inside a dark prison until the end of that solemnity. He then gave strict orders that sixteen soldiers be placed on guard, who would watch alternately day and night over the iron prison that opened onto a narrow street of the city. Certainly, that king knew how Peter had already been imprisoned before and had escaped in a completely marvellous manner, and he did not want a similar thing to happen again. But all these precautions, iron doors, chains, guards, and sentinels served only to give greater prominence to the work of God.

Since the most powerful weapon left by the Saviour to Christians is prayer, the faithful, deprived of their common father and shepherd, gathered together, weeping over

the imprisonment of St. Peter and continually offering prayers to God, that He would deign to come to the aid of the head of His Church. Although their prayers were fervent, it pleased the Lord to exercise their faith and patience for a few days to further reveal the effects of Divine Omnipotence.

It was already the night before the day set for Peter's death. He was completely resigned to divine dispositions, equally prepared to live or die for the glory of his Lord. Therefore, in the darkness of that horrible prison, he remained with the greatest tranquillity of his soul. Peter was sleeping, but He who has promised to assist His Church was watching over him. It was midnight, and everything was in deep silence, when suddenly a dazzling light illuminated the entire prison. And behold, an angel sent by God shook Peter, woke him, saying: "Quick, get up." At these words, both chains fell off his hands. Then the angel continued: "Put your clothes on and your sandals." St. Peter did everything, and the angel went on saying: "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." Peter obeyed, but it seemed to him that everything was a dream and that he was out of his mind. Meanwhile, the doors of the prison being open, he went out following the angel who was going before him. After passing the first and second guards, without them giving the slightest sign of seeing them, they reached the iron door of enormous thickness, which, exiting from the prison building, led into the city. That door opened by itself. Having exited, they walked a little together until the angel disappeared. Then Peter, reflecting on himself: "Now," he said, "I realise that the Lord has truly sent His angel to deliver me from the hands of Herod and from the judgment that the Jews were expecting him to carry out on me." After meticulously considering the place where he was, he went directly to the house of a certain Mary, the mother of John, surnamed Mark, where many faithful were gathered in prayer, pleading with God to deign to come to the aid of the head of His Church.

When St. Peter arrived at that house, he began to knock at the door. A girl, named Rhoda, went to see who it

was. "Who is there?" she said. And Peter: "It is I, open." The girl, recognising his voice well, almost beside herself with joy, did not pay attention to open the door and, leaving him outside, ran to inform the masters. "Do you not know? It is Peter." But they said: "You are out of your mind, Peter is in prison and cannot be here at this hour." But she kept insisting that it was really him. They then added: "What you have seen or heard may be his angel, who has come in his form to give us some news." While they were discussing with the girl, Peter continued to knock louder saying: "Hey, open." This prompted them to run quickly to open, and they realised that it truly was Peter.

To all, it seemed a dream, and each thought they were seeing a dead man resurrected. Some asked who had freed him, others when, some were impatient to know if some miracle had been performed.

Then Peter, to satisfy them all, made a sign with his hand for them to be silent, and told them in order what had happened with the angel and how he had been freed from prison. Everyone wept with tenderness and, praising God, thanked Him for the favour He had done them.

Peter, no longer considering his life safe in Jerusalem, said to those disciples: "Go and report these things to James (the Lesser, Bishop of Jerusalem) and to the other brothers, and relieve them from the worry they are in because of me. As for me, I consider it appropriate to leave this city and go elsewhere."

When the news spread that God had so prodigiously saved the head of the Church, all the faithful were greatly consoled.

The Catholic Church celebrates the memory of this glorious event on the first of August under the title of the Feast of St. Peter in Chains.

But what became of Herod and his guards? When day broke, the guards who had heard and seen nothing went early in the morning to visit the prison. When they found Peter no longer there, they were seized with the deepest astonishment.

The matter was immediately reported to Herod, who ordered that St. Peter be sought, but it was not possible for him to find him. Then, indignant, he had the soldiers put on trial and had them all condemned to death, perhaps for suspicion of negligence or infidelity, having found all the doors of the prison open.

But the unfortunate Herod did not take long to pay the price for the injustices and torments inflicted on the followers of Jesus Christ. For some political matters, he had gone from Jerusalem to the city of Caesarea, and while he was enjoying the applause with which the people foolishly flattered him, calling him God, at that very moment he was struck by an angel of the Lord. He was carried out of the square and, amid indescribable pains, devoured by worms, he expired.

This fact demonstrates how diligently God comes to the aid of His faithful servants, and gives a terrible warning to the wicked. They must greatly fear the hand of God, which severely punishes even in this present life those who despise religion, whether in sacred matters or in the person of His ministers.

CHAPTER XXIII. Peter in Rome. – He transfers the apostolic chair there. – His first letter. – Progress of the Gospel. *Year 42 of Jesus Christ.*

The Apostle St. Peter, after fleeing from Jerusalem following the impulses of the Holy Spirit, decided to transfer the Holy See to Rome.

Therefore, after holding his chair in Antioch for seven years, he set out for Rome. On his journey, he preached Jesus Christ in Pontus and Bithynia, which are two vast provinces of Asia Minor. Continuing his journey, he preached the Holy Gospel in Sicily and Naples, appointing St. Aspren as bishop of that city. Finally, he arrived in Rome in the Year forty-two of Jesus Christ, while an emperor named Claudius was reigning.

Peter found that city in a truly deplorable state.

It was, says St. Leo, an immense sea of iniquity, a cesspool of all vices, a forest of raging beasts. The streets and squares were strewn with bronze and stone statues worshipped as gods, and before those hideous idols incense was burned and sacrifices were made. The devil himself was honoured with vile filth. The most shameful actions were considered acts of virtue. Added to this were the laws that prohibited any new religion. The idolatrous priests and philosophers were also serious obstacles. Moreover, it was a matter of preaching a religion that disapproved of the worship of all gods, condemned all sorts of vices, and commanded the most sublime virtues.

All these difficulties, instead of stopping the zeal of the Prince of the Apostles, ignited it even more in the desire to free that miserable city from the darkness of death. St. Peter, therefore, relying solely on the help of the Lord, entered Rome to make the metropolis of the empire the first seat of the priesthood, the centre of Christianity.

The fame, moreover, of the virtues and miracles of Jesus Christ had already reached there. Pilate had sent a report to Emperor Tiberius, who, moved upon reading the holy life and death of the Saviour, had decided to count him among the Roman gods. But the Lord of Heaven and earth did not want to be confused with the foolish deities of the pagans and arranged for the Roman Senate to reject Tiberius's proposal as contrary to the laws of the empire[\[19\]](#).

Peter began to preach the Gospel to the Jews who then lived in Trastevere, that is, in a part of the city of Rome located across the Tiber. From the synagogue of the Jews, he passed to preach to the Gentiles, who with true joy rushed anxiously to receive Baptism. Their number became so great, and their faith so alive, that St. Paul shortly thereafter had to console the Romans by writing these words: "Your faith is proclaimed," that is, it speaks for itself, extends its fame throughout the world[\[20\]](#). Nor did the blessings of Heaven fall only on the lower people, but also on persons of the highest nobility. One could see men elevated to the highest offices of

Rome abandoning the worship of false gods to place themselves under the pleasing yoke of Jesus Christ. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, says that Peter's arguments were so robust and insinuated themselves with such sweetness into the hearts of the listeners, that he became master of their affections and all remained as if enchanted by the words of life that came from his mouth and were not satisfied to listen to him. So great was the number of those who asked for Baptism that Peter, helped by some of his companions, administered it on the banks of the Tiber, in the same way that St. John the Baptist had administered it on those of the Jordan[\[21\]](#).

Upon arriving in Rome, Peter lived in the suburb called Trastevere, not far from the place where the Church of Santa Cecilia was later built. From here arose the special veneration that the Trastevere inhabitants still hold towards the person of the Supreme Pontiff. Among the first to receive the faith was a senator named Pudens, who had held the highest offices of the State. He gave hospitality in his house to the Prince of the Apostles, and he took advantage of this to celebrate the Divine Mysteries, administer the Holy Eucharist to the faithful, and explain the truths of the faith to those who came to listen to him. That house was soon transformed into a temple consecrated to God under the title of the Shepherd. It is the oldest Christian temple in Rome, and it is believed to be the same one that is currently called St. Pudenziana. Almost simultaneously, another Church was founded by the same Apostle, which is believed to be the one that today is called St. Peter in Chains.

St. Peter, seeing how Rome was so well-disposed to receive the light of the Gospel, and at the same time a very suitable place to maintain relations with all the countries of the world, established his chair in Rome, that is, he established that Rome would be the centre and place of his special dwelling, where the various Christian nations could and should turn in their doubts of religion and in their various spiritual needs. The Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the establishment of the chair of St. Peter in Rome



on January 18.

It should be noted here that by the seat or chair of St. Peter, one does not mean the material chair, but the exercise of that supreme authority that he received from Jesus Christ, especially when He told him that whatever he would bind or loose on earth would also be bound or loosed in Heaven. It refers to the exercise of that authority conferred upon him by Jesus Christ to shepherd the universal flock of the faithful, to support and preserve the other shepherds in the unity of faith and doctrine as the supreme pontiffs have always done from St. Peter to the reigning Leo XIII.

Since the text is quite lengthy, I will provide a translation of the first part. If you would like the entire translated text, please let me know.

Since the activities that Saint Peter had in Rome no longer allowed him to visit the churches he had founded in various countries, he wrote a long and sublime letter addressed especially to the Christians living in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, and Cappadocia, which are provinces of Asia Minor. He, as a loving father, directs his speech to his children to encourage them to be steadfast in the faith he had preached to them and especially warns them to guard against the errors that heretics, even at that time, were spreading against the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

He then concludes this letter with the following words: 'You, oh elders, that is, bishops and priests, I urge you to shepherd the flock of God that depends on you, governing it not by compulsion, but willingly, not for the sake of dishonest gain, but with a ready mind, and being examples to your flock. And you, oh young people, all you Christians, be subject to the priests with true humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Be temperate and watchful because your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour, but resist him courageously in the faith.

The Christians who are in Babylon (that is, in Rome) greet you, and especially Mark, my son in Christ, sends

you greetings.

The grace of the Lord be with all of you who live in Jesus Christ. Amen.[\[221\]](#)‘

The Romans who had embraced the faith preached by Peter with great fervour expressed to Saint Mark, the faithful disciple of the Apostle, their strong desire that he put in writing what Peter preached. Saint Mark had indeed accompanied the Prince of the Apostles on several journeys and had heard him preach in many countries. Therefore, from what he had heard in the sermons and in private conversations with his master, and especially illuminated and inspired by the Holy Spirit, he was truly able to satisfy the pious desires of those faithful. Thus, he set out to write the Gospel, that is, a faithful account of the actions of the Saviour. Thus, this is what we have today under the name of the Gospel according to Saint Mark.

Saint Peter from Rome sent various disciples of his to different parts of Italy and to many countries of the world. He sent Saint Apollinaris to Ravenna, Saint Trophimus to Gaul, specifically to the city of Arles, from where the Gospel spread to other countries of France. He sent Saint Mark to Alexandria in Egypt to found that church in his name. Thus, the city of Rome, the capital of the entire Roman Empire, the city of Alexandria, which was the first after Rome, and that of Antioch, the capital of the entire East, had the Prince of the Apostles as their founder, and thus became the three first patriarchal sees, among which the dominion of the Catholic world was divided for many centuries, always preserving the dependence of the Alexandrian and Antiochene patriarchs on the Roman Pontiff, head of the whole Church, universal pastor, centre of unity. While Saint Peter sent many of his disciples to preach the Gospel elsewhere, he ordained priests in Rome, consecrated bishops, among whom he had chosen Saint Zeno as vicar to act in his stead on occasions when some serious matter obliged him to leave that city.

CHAPTER XXIV. Saint Peter defines an issue at the Council of

Jerusalem. – Saint James confirms his judgment. *Year of Jesus Christ 50.*

Rome was the ordinary residence of the Prince of the Apostles, but his care had to extend to all Christian faithful. Therefore, whenever difficulties or questions arose regarding matters of religion, he would send one of his disciples, or write letters on the matter, and sometimes he would go himself in person, as he did on the occasion when a question arose in Antioch between the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Jews believed that, in order to be good Christians, it was necessary to receive circumcision and observe all the ceremonies of Moses. The Gentiles refused to submit to this demand of the Jews, and the matter reached such a point that it caused serious harm and scandal among the simple faithful and among the very preachers of the Gospel. Therefore, Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas deemed it good to appeal to the judgment of the head of the Church and the other Apostles, so that with their authority they could resolve any doubt.

Saint Peter therefore went from Rome to Jerusalem to convene a general council. Since the Lord has promised His assistance to the head of the Church, so that his faith may not fail, He certainly assists him also when the principal pastors of the Church are gathered with him, especially since Jesus Christ assured us that He would indeed be in the midst of those who, even if only two, gathered in His name. When the Prince of the Apostles arrived in that city, he invited all the other Apostles and all the primary pastors he could gather. Then Paul and Barnabas, welcomed into the council, presented their message on behalf of the Gentiles of Antioch. They showed the reasons and fears of both sides, asking for their deliberation for the peace and security of consciences. "There are," said Saint Paul, "some of the sect of the Pharisees, who have believed and assert that it is necessary that, as the Jews, the Gentiles also be circumcised and must observe the law of Moses if they wish to obtain salvation."

That venerable assembly began to examine this

point, and after mature discussion on the proposed matter, Peter rose and began to speak saying: "Brothers, you know well how God chose me to make known to the Gentiles the light of the Gospel and the truths of the faith, as happened with Cornelius the Centurion and all his family. Now, God who knows the hearts of men, has borne witness to those good Gentiles by sending upon them the Holy Spirit, as He had done upon us, and He made no distinction between us and them, showing that faith had purified them from the impurities that previously excluded them from grace. Therefore, the matter is clear: without circumcision, the Gentiles are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Why then do we want to test God, as if provoking Him to give us a more certain proof of His will? Why impose on these our Gentile brothers a yoke that we and our fathers have been unable to bear? Therefore, we believe that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles must be saved."

After the judgment of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the whole assembly fell silent and was quiet. Paul and Barnabas confirmed what Peter had said, recounting the conversions and the miracles that God had been pleased to work through them among the Gentiles they had converted to the Gospel.

When Paul and Barnabas had finished speaking, Saint James, Bishop of Jerusalem, confirmed Peter's judgment by saying: "Brothers, now pay attention to me as well. Peter rightly said that from the beginning God granted grace to the Gentiles, forming a single people to glorify His holy name. Now this is confirmed by the words of the prophets, which we see fulfilled in these facts. For this reason, I judge with Peter that the Gentiles should not be troubled after they have converted to Jesus Christ. Only it seems to me necessary to order them that, with regard to the weak conscience of the Jewish brothers and to facilitate the union between these two peoples, it be prohibited to eat things sacrificed to idols, strangled meats, blood, and fornication should also be prohibited."

This last thing, that is, fornication, did not need to be prohibited as it is entirely contrary to the dictates of reason and forbidden by the sixth article of the Decalogue. However, this prohibition was renewed regarding the Gentiles, because in the worship of their false deities they thought it was lawful, indeed pleasing, to make offerings of unclean and obscene things.

The judgment of Saint Peter thus confirmed by Saint James pleased the whole council. Therefore, by common agreement, they decided to choose authoritative persons to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. To these, in the name of the council, letters were delivered containing the decisions made. The letters were of this tenor: "The Apostles and priests, brothers to the Gentile brothers who are in Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, greetings. Having heard that some coming from here have troubled and distressed your consciences with arbitrary ideas, it seemed good to us here gathered to choose and send to you Paul and Barnabas, men very dear to us, who have sacrificed their lives and exposed themselves to danger for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. With them we send Silas and Judas, who will deliver our letters to you and will confirm to you verbally the same truths. In fact, it has been judged by the Holy Spirit and by us not to impose on you any other burden, except that which you must observe, namely to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from strangled meats, from blood, and from fornication. By abstaining from these things, you will do well. Stay in peace."

This was the first general council presided over by Saint Peter, where, as Prince of the Apostles and head of the Church, he defined the question with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, every faithful Christian must believe that the things defined by the general councils gathered and confirmed by the Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ and successor of Saint Peter, are very certain truths, which give the same reasons for credibility as if they came from the mouth of the Holy Spirit, because they represent the Church with its head, to whom God has promised His infallibility

until the end of the ages.

CHAPTER XXV. Saint Peter confers the fullness of the Apostolate to Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas. – He is warned by Saint Paul. – He returns to Rome. *Year 54 of Jesus Christ.*

God had already made known several times that He wanted to send Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas to preach to the Gentiles. But until then, they exercised their sacred ministry as simple priests, and perhaps also as bishops, without having yet been conferred the fullness of the apostolate. When they went to Jerusalem because of the council and recounted the wonders performed by God through them among the Gentiles, they also engaged in special conversations with Saint Peter, James, and John. They recounted, says the sacred text, great wonders to those who held the highest positions in the Church, among whom were certainly the three named Apostles, who considered themselves as the three main pillars of the Church. It was on this occasion, says Saint Augustine, that Saint Peter, as head of the Church, Vicar of Jesus Christ and divinely inspired, conferred upon Paul and Barnabas the fullness of the apostolate, with the task of bringing the light of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Thus, Saint Paul was elevated to the dignity of Apostle, with the same fullness of powers enjoyed by the other Apostles established by Jesus Christ.

While Saint Peter and Saint Paul were staying in Antioch, an event occurred that deserves to be reported. Saint Peter was certainly convinced that the ceremonies of the law of Moses were no longer obligatory for the Gentiles. However, when he was with the Jews, he ate in the Jewish manner, fearing to offend them if he acted otherwise. Such condescension caused many Gentiles to grow cold in their faith. Thus, aversion arose between Gentiles and Jews, and the bond of charity that characterises the true followers of Jesus Christ was broken. Saint Peter was unaware of the rumours that were circulating about this matter. But Saint Paul, noticing that Peter's conduct could generate scandal in the community of the faithful, thought to correct him publicly, saying: "If

you, being a Jew, have come to know by faith that you can live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, why do you want to compel the Gentiles to observe the Jewish law by your example?" Saint Peter was very pleased with this advice, as it publicly declared to all the faithful that the ceremonial law of Moses was no longer obligatory, and as one who preached to others the humility of Jesus Christ, he knew how to practise it himself, showing no sign of resentment. From then on, he had no regard for the ceremonial law of Moses.

It should be noted here, however, with the Holy Fathers, that what Saint Peter was doing was not wrong in itself, yet it provided Christians with a reason for discord. It is also believed that Saint Peter agreed with Saint Paul regarding the correction to be made publicly, so that the cessation of the ceremonial law of Moses would be more widely known.

From Antioch, he went to preach in various cities until he was warned by God to return to Rome, to assist the faithful in a fierce persecution stirred up against Christians. When Saint Peter arrived in that city, Nero was governing the empire, a man full of vices and consequently the most opposed to Christianity. He had deliberately set fire in various places in that capital, so that much of it was largely consumed by flames; and he then blamed the Christians for that wicked act.

In his cruelty, Nero had ordered the execution of a virtuous philosopher named Seneca, who had been his teacher. His own mother fell victim to that unnatural son. But the gravity of these misdeeds made a terrible impression even on Nero's hardened heart, so much so that he seemed to see spectres accompanying him day and night. Therefore, he sought to appease the infernal shadows, or rather the remorse of his conscience, with sacrifices. Wanting to procure some relief, he had the most reputable magicians sought out, to make use of their magic and their spells. The magician Simon, the same one who had tried to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit from Saint Peter, took advantage of the absence of the Holy Apostle to go

there and, through flattery towards the emperor, discredit the Christian religion.

#### CHAPTER XXVI. Saint Peter raises a dead man. *Year 66 of Jesus Christ.*

Simon the Magician knew that if he could perform some miracle, he would gain great credit. Those miracles that Saint Peter was performing everywhere only served to ignite in him more envy and anger. Therefore, he was studying some trick to make himself appear superior to Saint Peter. He confronted him several times, but always came away full of confusion. And since he boasted of being able to heal ailments, prolong life, and raise the dead—things he saw done by Saint Peter—it happened that he was invited to do the same. A young man from a noble family and a relative of the emperor had died. His parents, being inconsolable, were advised to turn to Saint Peter to bring him back to life. Others, instead, to invite Simon.

Both arrived at the house of the deceased at the same time. Saint Peter willingly agreed to let Simon try to restore life to the dead man. He knew that only God can perform true miracles, and that no one can boast of having performed them except by divine virtue and in confirmation of the Catholic faith, and that therefore all the efforts of the wicked Simon would be in vain. Full of arrogance and driven by the evil spirit, Simon foolishly accepted the challenge, and, convinced he would win, proposed the following condition. If Peter succeeds in raising the dead, I will be condemned to death, but if I give life to this corpse, Peter will pay with his head. Since none of those present refused that proposal, and Saint Peter willingly accepted it, the magician set to work.

He approached the coffin of the deceased and, invoking the demon and performing a thousand other spells, it seemed to some that the cold corpse showed some sign of life. Then Simon's supporters began to shout that Peter must die.

The Holy Apostle laughed at that deception and,



modestly asking everyone to be silent for a moment, said: "If the dead man has been raised, let him rise, walk, and speak; *si resuscitatus est, surgat, ambulet, fabuletur*. It is not true that he moves his head or shows any sign of life. It is your imagination that makes you think so. Command Simon to step away from the bed, and you will soon see all hope of life vanish from the dead man.[\[23\]](#)"

So it was done, and the one who had previously been dead continued to lie like a stone devoid of spirit and motion. Then the Holy Apostle knelt a short distance from the coffin and fervently prayed to the Lord, begging Him to glorify His holy name to the confusion of the wicked and to the comfort of the good. After a brief prayer, turning to the corpse, he said aloud: "Young man, arise; Jesus Lord gives you life and health."

At the command of this voice, to which death was accustomed to obey, the spirit promptly returned to vivify that cold body, and so that it would not seem an illusion, he stood up, spoke, walked, and was given food. In fact, Peter took him by the hand and, alive and well, returned him to his mother. That good woman did not know how to express her gratitude to the Saint, and humbly begged him not to leave her house, so that he who had risen by his hands would not be abandoned. Saint Peter comforted her, saying: "We are servants of the Lord. He has raised him and will never abandon him. Do not fear for your son, for he has his guardian."

Now it remained for the magician to be condemned to death, and already a crowd was ready to stone him under a rain of stones, if the Apostle, moved to pity for him, had not asked that he be left alive, saying that for him the shame he had experienced was punishment enough. "Let him live," he said, "but let him live to see the Kingdom of Jesus Christ grow and expand ever more."

CHAPTER XXVII. Flight. – Fall. – The desperate death of Simon the Magician. *Year 67 of Jesus Christ.*

In the resurrection of that young man, the

magician Simon should have admired the goodness and charity of Peter and at the same time recognised the intervention of divine power, and thus abandon the demon he had served for so long. However, pride made him even more obstinate. Animated by the spirit of Satan, he became more furious than ever and resolved at all costs to take revenge against Saint Peter. With this thought, one day he went to Nero and told him that he was disgusted with the Galileans, that is, the Christians, that he was determined to abandon the world, and that to give everyone an infallible proof of his divinity, he wanted to ascend to Heaven by himself.

Nero was very pleased with the proposal. Since he always desired to find new pretexts to persecute Christians, he had Saint Peter notified, who, according to him, was considered a great expert in magic, and challenged him to do the same and to prove that Simon was a liar, that if he did not do so, he himself would be judged a liar and impostor, and as such condemned to be beheaded. The Apostle, supported by the protection of Heaven, which never fails to come to the defence of truth, accepted the invitation. Saint Peter, therefore, without any human assistance, armed himself with the invincible shield of prayer. He also ordered all the faithful to unite their prayers with his through fasting. He ordered all the faithful to invoke divine mercy with universal fasting and continuous prayers. The day on which these religious practises were performed was Saturday, and from this came the Saturday fast, which was still practised in Rome in the time of St. Augustine in memory of this event.

On the contrary, the magician Simon, all emboldened by the favour promised to him by his demons, was preparing to plot and complete the fraud with them, and in his madness believed he could strike a blow against the Church of Jesus Christ. The designated day arrived. An immense crowd of people was gathered in a large square in Rome. Nero himself, with all his court, dressed in shining garments of gold and gems, was seated on a platform under a richly adorned pavilion, watching and encouraging his champion. A deep

silence fell. Simon appeared dressed as if he were a God and, pretending to be calm, showed confidence in obtaining victory. While he was delivering pompous speeches, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared in the sky (it was all a diabolical illusion and a game of imagination), and being immersed in the magician in the sight of all the people, the demon lifted him off the ground and transported him through the air. He was already touching the clouds and beginning to disappear from the sight of the people, who, with their eyes raised upwards, rejoicing in wonder and clapping their hands, shouted: Victory! Miracle! Glory and honour to Simon, true son of the Gods!

Peter, in the company of St. Paul, without any ostentation, knelt on the ground and, with his hands raised to Heaven, fervently prayed to Jesus Christ to come to the aid of His Church to make truth triumph before that deluded people. Said and done: the hand of Almighty God, which had allowed the evil spirits to lift Simon to that height, suddenly took away all their power, so that, deprived of strength, they had to abandon him in the gravest danger and at the height of his glory. Stripped of Simon's diabolical virtue, abandoned to the weight of his fat body, he fell with a disastrous crash, and plummeted to the ground with such force that, shattering all his limbs, his blood splattered even on Nero's tribunal. Such a fall occurred near a temple dedicated to Romulus, where today the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian exists.

The unfortunate Simon would certainly have lost his life if Saint Peter had not invoked God in his favour. Peter, says St. Maximus, prayed to the Lord to free him from death, both to make Simon aware of the weakness of his demons and because, confessing the power of Jesus Christ, he would implore from Him the forgiveness of his sins. But he who had long professed to despise the graces of the Lord was too obstinate to yield even in this case where God abounded in His mercy. Simon, having become the object of mockery for all the people, full of confusion, begged some of his friends to take him away from there. Taken to a nearby house, he survived a few more days, until, overwhelmed by pain and shame, he

resorted to the desperate decision to rid himself of those miserable remnants of life and, throwing himself out of a window, voluntarily took his own life[\[24\]](#).

The fall of Simon is a vivid image of the fall of those Christians who, either renouncing the Christian religion or neglecting to observe it, fall from the sublime degree of virtue to which the Christian faith has raised them, and miserably ruin themselves in vices and disorders, to the dishonour of the Christian character and the religion they profess, and with sometimes irreparable damage to their souls.

CHAPTER XXVIII. Peter is sought for death. – Jesus appears to him and predicts his imminent martyrdom. – The holy Apostle's Testament.

The punishment inflicted on Simon the Magician, while making evident the vengeance of Heaven, greatly contributed to increasing the number of Christians. Nero, however, seeing a multitude of people abandoning the profane worship of the Gods to profess the religion preached by Saint Peter, and having noticed that the Holy Apostle had succeeded in winning over people favoured by him, and those same people who were instruments of iniquity in court, felt his anger against Christians double and began to become even more cruel towards them.

In the midst of the fury of that persecution, Peter was tireless in encouraging the faithful to be steadfast in faith until death and in converting new Gentiles, so that the blood of the martyrs, far from terrifying Christians and diminishing their number, was a fruitful seed that multiplied them every day. Only the Jews of Rome, perhaps spurred on by the Jews of Judea, remained obstinate. Therefore, God, wanting to come to the ultimate test to overcome their obstinacy, had His Apostle publicly predict that shortly He would raise up a king against that nation, who, after reducing it to the gravest distress, would level their city to the ground, forcing its citizens to die of hunger and thirst. Then, he said to them, they would see some eat the bodies of others and

consume each other, until, having fallen prey to their enemies, they would see before their eyes their wives, daughters, and children cruelly torn apart and killed upon the stones, their very lands would be reduced to desolation and ruin by sword and fire. Those who escape the common disaster will be sold like pack animals and subjected to perpetual servitude. Such evils will come upon you, oh children of Jacob, because you rejoiced at the death of the Son of God and now refuse to believe in Him[\[25\]](#).

But knowing well that the ministers of persecution would toil in vain if they did not remove the head of the Christians, they turned against him to have him in their hands and put him to death. The faithful, considering the loss they would suffer with his death, sought every means to prevent him from falling into the hands of the persecutors. When they realised that it was impossible for him to remain hidden any longer, they advised him to leave Rome and retreat to a place where he was less known. Peter refused such advice suggested by filial love and rather ardently desired the crown of martyrdom. But, as the faithful continued to pray him to do this for the good of the Church of God, that is, to try to preserve his life to instruct, confirm the believers in faith, and win souls for Christ, he finally consented and decided to leave.

At night he took leave of the faithful to escape the fury of the idolaters. But when he reached outside the city, through the 'Porta Capena' gate, now called the San Sebastiano Gate, Jesus Christ appeared to him in the same form in which he had known Him and frequented for many years. The Apostle, although surprised by this unexpected appearance, nevertheless, according to his readiness of spirit, took courage to ask Him, saying: "Oh Lord, where are you going?" *Domine, quo vadis?* Jesus replied: "I come to Rome to be crucified again." Having said this, He disappeared.

From those words, Peter understood that his own crucifixion was imminent, for he knew that the Lord could no longer be crucified again for Himself, but must be crucified

in the person of His Apostle. In memory of this event, outside the San Sebastiano Gate, a church was built, still called today "*Domine, quo vadis*," or "*Santa Maria ad Passus*," that is, Saint Mary at the Feet, because the Saviour in that place, where He spoke to Saint Peter, left the sacred imprint of His feet on a stone. This stone is still preserved in the Church of San Sebastiano.

After that warning, Saint Peter turned back and, when questioned by the Christians of Rome about the reason for his swift return, he told them everything. No one had any doubt that Peter would be imprisoned and would glorify the Lord by giving his life for Him. Therefore, in fear of falling at any moment into the hands of the persecutors and that in those calamitous moments the Church would be left without its supreme pastor, Peter thought to appoint some more zealous bishops, so that one of them would succeed him in the Pontificate after his death. These were Saint Linus, Saint Cletus, Saint Clement, and Saint Anacletus, who had already assisted him in the office of his vicars in various needs of the Church.

Not content with having thus provided for the needs of the Papal See, Saint Peter also wanted to send a letter to all the faithful, as if for his testament, that is, a second letter. This letter is addressed to the universal body of Christians, naming in particular those of Pontus, Galatia, and other provinces of Asia where he had preached.

After referring again to the things already mentioned in his first letter, he recommends always keeping their eyes on Jesus the Saviour, guarding against the corruption of this age and worldly pleasures. To resolve them to remain steadfast in virtue, he sets before them the rewards that the Saviour has prepared in the eternal kingdom of Heaven. At the same time, he recalls to their memory the terrible punishments with which God often punishes sinners even in this life, but infallibly in the next with the eternal penalty of fire. Then, turning his thoughts to the future, he predicts the scandals that many wicked men would present, the

errors they would disseminate, and the tricks they would use to propagate them. "But know this," he says, "that these are all impostors and seducers of souls, like springs without water and dark mists driven by the winds, who promise a freedom that always ends in a miserable slavery, in which they themselves are ensnared; after which judgment, perdition, and fire are reserved for them."

"For me," he continues, "I am certain, according to the revelation received from Our Lord Jesus Christ, that shortly I must leave this tabernacle of my body, but I will ensure that even after my death you have the means to recall such things to your mind. Be assured, the promises of the Lord will never fail. The final day will come when the Heavens will cease to be, the elements will be dissolved or devoured by fire, and the earth with all that it contains will be consumed. Therefore, be occupied in works of piety, let us patiently and joyfully await the coming of the day of the Lord, and, according to His promises, let us live in such a way as to pass to the contemplation of the heavens and the possession of eternal glory."

Then he urges them to keep themselves free from sin and to constantly believe that the long patience that the Lord often shows us is for our common good. He strongly recommends not to interpret the Holy Scriptures with private understanding of each individual, and particularly notes the letters of Saint Paul, whom he calls his dearest brother, of whom he says: "Jesus Christ delays his coming to give you time to convert. These things were written to you by Paul, our dearest brother, according to the wisdom that has been given to him by God. He does the same in all his letters, where he speaks of these same things. However, be very careful that in these letters there are some things hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable men twist to their own destruction, as they do with other parts of the Holy Scripture, which they misuse to their own perdition." These words deserve to be carefully considered by Protestants, who want to entrust the interpretation of the Bible to any man of the people, no

matter how uncultivated and ignorant he may be. What Saint Peter says can be applied to these words, namely that the whimsical interpretation of the Bible resulted in their own destruction: *ad suam ipsorum perditionem*[\[26\]](#).

CHAPTER XXIX. In prison Saint Peter converts Processus and Martinian. – His martyrdom[\[27\]](#). *Year 67 of the Common Era.*

Finally, the moment had come when the predictions made by Jesus Christ regarding the death of his Apostle had to be fulfilled. So many labours deserved to be crowned with the palm of Martyrdom. One day, feeling all aflame with love for the person of the Divine Saviour and eagerly desiring to join Him as soon as possible, he was surprised by persecutors who immediately bound him and led him to a deep and dark prison called Mamertine Prison, where the most notorious criminals were usually confined[\[28\]](#). Divine Providence arranged for Nero to be away from Rome for some time due to government affairs, thus, Saint Peter remained in prison for about nine months. But the true servants of the Lord know how to promote the glory of God at all times and in all places.

In the darkness of the prison, Peter, exercising the cares of his apostolate and especially the ministry of the Divine Word, had the consolation of converting to Jesus Christ the two guards of the prison, named Processus and Martinian, along with 47 other people who were confined in the same place.

It is said, and confirmed by the authority of accredited writers, that since there was no water there to administer Baptism to those new converts, God caused a perennial spring to gush forth at that moment, whose waters continue to flow even today. Travellers who go to Rome make it a point to visit the Mamertine Prison, which is at the foot of the Capitol, where the miraculous fountain still springs forth. That building, both underground and above ground, is an object of great veneration among Christians.

The ministers of the emperor tried several times to overcome the steadfastness of the holy Apostle, but, seeing



that all their efforts were in vain, and moreover seeing that, even in chains, he did not cease to preach Jesus Christ and thus increase the number of Christians, they decided to silence him with death. It was one morning when Peter saw the prison open. The executioners entered, bound him tightly, and announced that he was to be led to execution. Oh! Then his heart was filled with joy. "I rejoice," he exclaimed, "because soon I will see my Lord. Soon I will go to meet Him whom I have loved and from whom I have received so many signs of affection and mercy."

Before being led to execution, the holy Apostle, according to Roman law, had to undergo painful flogging. This caused him great joy, for thus he became an ever more faithful follower of his Divine Master, who before being crucified underwent similar punishment.

The path he took to the place of execution is also worth noting. The Romans, conquerors of the world, after subjugating some nations, prepared the procession of triumph on a magnificent chariot in the valley or rather in the plain at the foot of the Vatican hill. From there, by the sacred way, also called the triumphal way, the victors ascended triumphantly to the Capitol. Saint Peter, after having subjected the world to the sweet yoke of Christ, was also led out of prison and along the same road to the place where those great solemnities were being prepared.

Thus, he also celebrated the ceremony of triumph and offered himself as a holocaust to the Lord, outside the gate of Rome, just as outside Jerusalem his Divine Master had been crucified.

Between the Janiculum[\[29\]](#) hill and the Vatican, there was a valley where, gathering the waters, a marsh was formed. On the other peak of the mountain overlooking the marsh was the place destined for the martyrdom of the greatest man in the world. The intrepid athlete, when he arrived at the place of execution and saw the cross on which he was condemned to die, full of courage and joy exclaimed: "Hail, Oh cross, salvation of nations, standard of Christ, Oh dearest cross,

hail, Oh comfort of Christians. You are what assures me the way to Heaven, you are what assures me entry into the Kingdom of Glory. You that I once saw reddened with the most holy blood of my Master, today be my help, my comfort, my salvation. [\[30\]](#)“

However, Saint Peter considered it too great an honour for himself to die in a manner similar to that of his Divine Master. Therefore, he prayed to his crucifiers that, as a grace, they would allow him to die with his head down. Since this manner of dying caused him more suffering, the grace was easily granted to him. But his body could not naturally remain on the cross if his hands and feet were only nailed. Therefore, his holy limbs were bound with ropes to that hard trunk.

He was accompanied to the place of execution by an infinite crowd of Christians and infidels. That man of God, amidst the very torments, almost forgetting himself, consoled the first so that they would not grieve for him and worked to save the latter, urging them to leave the worship of idols and embrace the Gospel, so that they could know the one true God, creator of all things. The Lord, who always directed the zeal of such a faithful minister, consoled him in those last agonies with the conversion of a great number of idolaters of every condition and sex [\[31\]](#).

While Saint Peter hung on the cross, God also wished to console him with a heavenly vision. Two angels appeared to him with two crowns of lilies and roses, to indicate to him that his sufferings had come to an end and that he was to be crowned with glory in blessed eternity [\[32\]](#).

Saint Peter achieved such a noble triumph on the cross on June 29, in the seventieth year of Jesus Christ and the sixty-seventh of the Common Era. On the same day that Saint Peter died on the cross, Saint Paul, under the sword of the same tyrant, glorified Jesus Christ by being beheaded. This was truly a glorious day for all the Churches of Christendom, but especially for that of Rome, which, after being founded by Peter and long nourished with the doctrine of

both these Princes of the Apostles, is now consecrated by their martyrdom, by their blood, and exalted above all the churches of the world.

Thus, while the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem was imminent and its temple was to be burned, Rome, which was the capital and mistress of all nations, became through those two Apostles the Jerusalem of the New Covenant, the eternal city, and far more glorious than the old Jerusalem, as the grace of the Gospel and the priesthood of the new law are greater than the priesthood, all the ceremonies, and figures of the old law.

Saint Peter was martyred at the age of 86, after a pontificate of 35 years, 3 months, and 4 days. He spent three years especially in Jerusalem. He then held his chair for seven years in Antioch, the remainder in Rome.

CHAPTER XXX. The tomb of Saint Peter. – The attack on his body.

As soon as Saint Peter took his last breath, many Christians left the place of execution weeping for the death of the supreme Shepherd of the Church. Moreover, Saint Linus, his disciple and immediate successor, two priest brothers Saint Marcellus and Saint Apuleius, Saint Anacletus, and other fervent Christians gathered around the cross of Saint Peter. When the executioners then left the place of martyrdom, they laid the body of the holy Apostle, anointed it with precious perfumes, embalmed it, and took it to be buried near the Circus, that is, near Nero's gardens on the Vatican Hill, precisely in the place where it is still venerated today. His body was placed in a site where many martyrs, disciples of the holy Apostles and early devotees of the Catholic Church, had already been buried, who by order of Nero had been exposed to wild beasts, or crucified, or burned, or killed by unheard-of torments. Saint Anacletus had erected a small cemetery there, in one corner of which he raised a kind of oratory where the body of Saint Peter rests. This site became famous, and all the popes succeeding Saint Peter always showed a lively desire

to be buried there.

Shortly after the death of Saint Peter, some Christians from the East came to Rome, who, considering it a great treasure to possess the relics of the holy Apostle, resolved to acquire them. But, knowing that it would be useless to try to buy them with money, they thought of stealing them, as if they were their own, and bringing them back to those places from where the saint had come. Therefore, they courageously went to the tomb, extracted the body from there, and took it to the catacombs, which are an underground place, currently called Saint Sebastian, with the intention of sending it to the East as soon as the opportunity arose.

God, however, who had called that great Apostle to Rome to glorify it with martyrdom, also arranged for his body to be preserved in that city and to make that church the most glorious in the world. Therefore, when those Easterners went to carry out their plan, a storm arose with such a strong whirlwind that, due to the rumbling of the thunder and the flashing of the lightning, they were forced to interrupt their work.

The Christians of Rome noticed what had happened, and in great numbers, having left the city, they took the body of the holy Apostle back and brought it again to the Vatican Hill from where it had been taken[\[33\]](#).

In the year 103, Saint Anacletus, having become Supreme Pontiff, seeing that the persecutions against Christians had somewhat calmed, at his own expense raised a small temple to enclose the relics and the entire tomb existing there. This is the first church dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles.

This sacred deposit remained exposed to the veneration of the faithful until the middle of the Third Century. Only in the year 221, due to the ferocity with which Christians were persecuted, fearing that the bodies of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul would be profaned by the infidels, were they transported by the Pontiff to the catacombs called the Cemetery of Saint Callixtus, in that part

which today is called the Cemetery of Saint Sebastian. But in the year 255, Pope Saint Cornelius, at the prayer and request of Saint Lucina and other Christians, brought the body of Saint Paul back on the way to Ostia, to the place where he had been beheaded. The body of Saint Peter was again transported and placed in the original tomb at the foot of the Vatican Hill.

#### CHAPTER XXXI. Tomb and Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican.

In the early centuries of the Church, the faithful could not mostly go to the tomb of Saint Peter without the grave danger of being accused as Christians and brought before the tribunals of the persecutors. However, there was always a great gathering of people who came from distant lands to invoke the protection of Heaven at the tomb of Saint Peter. But when Constantine became the master of the Roman Empire and put an end to the persecutions, then everyone could freely show themselves as followers of Jesus Christ, and the tomb of Saint Peter became the sanctuary of the Christian world, where people came from every corner to venerate the relics of the first Vicar of Jesus Christ. The Emperor himself publicly professed the Gospel, and among the many signs he gave of his attachment to the Catholic religion, one was that he had various churches built, including one in honour of the Prince of the Apostles, which is why it is sometimes also called the Constantinian Basilica, more commonly known as St. Peter's Basilica.

Therefore, in the year 319, Constantine, at his own initiative and at the invitation of Saint Sylvester, established that the site of the new Church be at the foot of the Vatican, with the design that it would encompass the small temple built by Saint Anacletus, which until that time had been the object of common veneration. On the day that Emperor Constantine wanted to begin the holy undertaking, he laid down the imperial diadem and all the royal insignia on the site, then prostrated himself on the ground and shed many tears out of devoted tenderness. Taking up the spade, he began to dig

the ground with his own hands, thus starting the excavation of the foundations of the new basilica. He himself wanted to form the design and establish the space that was to encompass the new temple. Also, to encourage others to lend a hand to the work with eagerness, he wanted to carry on his shoulders twelve small boxes of earth in honour of the twelve Apostles. Then the body of Saint Peter was unearthed, and in the presence of numerous faithful and clergy, it was placed by Saint Sylvester in a large silver chest, with another gilded bronze chest placed immovably on the ground above it. The urn that contained the sacred deposit was five feet high, wide, and long. A large cross of pure gold weighing one hundred and fifty pounds, upon which were inscribed the names of Saint Helena and her son Constantine, was placed above it. Once that majestic building was completed, a crypt or underground chamber entirely adorned with gold and precious gems, surrounded by a multitude of gold and silver lamps, was prepared to house the precious treasure: the head of Saint Peter. Saint Sylvester invited many bishops and Christian faithful from all over the world attended this solemnity. To encourage them even more, he opened the treasure of the Church and granted many indulgences. The gathering was extraordinary. The solemnity was majestic. It was the first consecration that was made publicly with rites and ceremonies such as are still practised today in the consecration of sacred buildings. The function was completed in the year 324 on the eighteenth of November. The urn of Saint Peter, thus closed, was never reopened, and it has always been an object of veneration throughout Christendom. Constantine donated many resources for the decor and preservation of that august building. All the supreme Pontiffs competed to make the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles glorious.

But all human things wear out over time, and St. Peter's Basilica found itself in danger of ruin in the Sixteenth Century. Therefore, the Pontiffs decided to completely rebuild it. After much study, after great efforts and expenses, the foundation stone of the new temple was laid

in the year 1506. The great Pope Julius II, despite his advanced age and the deep chasm he had to descend to reach the base of the dome's pillar, nevertheless wanted to descend in person to solemnly establish and place the first stone. It is difficult to describe the efforts, the work, the money, the time, and the men that were employed in this marvellous construction.

The work was completed over the span of one hundred and twenty years, and finally Urban VIII, assisted by 22 cardinals and all those dignitaries who usually take part in papal functions, solemnly consecrated the majestic basilica on November 18, 1626, that is, on the same day that Saint Sylvester had consecrated the ancient basilica erected by Constantine. Throughout this time, amidst so many restorations and construction works, the relics of Saint Peter underwent no translation. Neither the urn nor the bronze chest were moved, nor was the crypt opened. The new floor, having to be somewhat elevated above the old one, was arranged to enclose the primitive chapel and thus leave the altar consecrated by Saint Sylvester intact. In this regard, it is noted that when the Architect Giacomo della Porta raised the layers of the floor around the old altar to overlay it with the new, he discovered the window that corresponded to the sacred urn. Lowering a light inside, he recognised the golden cross placed there by Constantine and his mother Saint Helena. He immediately reported everything to the Pope, who in 1594 was Clement VIII, and, accompanied by Cardinals Bellarmino and Antoniano, he personally went to the site and found what the architect had reported. The Pontiff did not want to open either the tomb or the urn, nor did he allow anyone to approach them, rather he ordered that the opening be sealed with cement. From then on, the tomb was never opened again, nor did anyone approach those venerable relics.

Travellers who go to Rome to visit the great Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican, when they first see it, remain as if enchanted. Also, the most famous figures for intellect and science, when returning to their countries, can

only give a faint idea of it.

Here is what can be easily understood. The church is adorned with the most exquisite marbles that could be obtained. Its breadth and elevation reach a point that astonishes the eye that gazes upon it. The floor, the walls and the vault are decorated with such mastery that they seem to have exhausted all the inventions of art. The dome, which, so to speak, rises to the clouds, is a compendium of all the beauties of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Above the dome, indeed above the very cupola, there is a sphere or ball of gilded bronze that, viewed from the ground, looks like a small game ball. But those who ascend and enter see a globe within which sixteen people can comfortably sit. In a word, in this Basilica, everything is so beautiful, so rare, and so well-crafted that it surpasses what can be imagined in the world. Princes, kings, monarchs, and emperors have contributed to adorn this marvellous building with magnificent gifts sent to the tomb of Saint Peter, often brought there by them from the most distant lands.

And it is precisely in the centre of such a magnificent building that rest the precious ashes of a poor fisherman, a man without human erudition and without riches, whose fortune consisted of a net. And this was willed by God so that men might understand how God, in His omnipotence, takes the most humble man in the eyes of the world to place him on the glorious throne to govern His people. They will also understand how He honours, even in this life, His faithful servants, and thus form some idea of the immense glory reserved in Heaven for those who live and die in His divine service. Kings, princes, emperors, and the greatest monarchs of the earth have come to implore the protection of the one who was taken from a boat to be made the supreme shepherd of the Church. Even heretics and infidels were compelled to respect him. God could have chosen the supreme shepherd of His Church from among the greatest and wisest of the earth. But then perhaps those wonders would have been attributed to their wisdom and power, which God wanted to be



entirely recognised as coming from His omnipotent hand.

Only in very rare cases have the popes allowed the relics of this great protector of Rome to be transported elsewhere. Therefore, few places in Christendom can boast possessing them: all the glory is in Rome.

Whoever would wish to write about the many pilgrimages made there at all times, from all parts of the world and from every class of people, the multitude of graces received there and the astounding miracles performed there would have to write many large volumes.

Meanwhile, filled with feelings of sincere gratitude, as a conclusion and fruit of what we have said about the actions of the Prince of the Apostles, we raise fervent prayers to the throne of the Most High God. We pray this fortunate Vicar and glorious martyr to deign to turn a merciful gaze from Heaven upon the present needs of His Church, to deign to protect and support her in the fierce assaults she must endure daily from her enemies, to obtain strength and courage for her successors, for all bishops, and for all sacred ministers, so that all may be worthy of the ministry entrusted to them by Christ, so that, comforted by His heavenly help, they may bring forth abundant fruits from their labours, promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls among the Christian peoples.

Blessed are those peoples who are united to Peter in the person of his successor Popes. They walk the path of salvation, while all those who find themselves outside this path and do not belong to the union of Peter have no hope of salvation. Jesus Christ Himself assures us that holiness and salvation can only be found in union with Peter, upon whom rests the immovable foundation of His Church. Let us heartily thank divine goodness for making us children of Peter.

And since he has the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, let us pray to him to be our protector in our present needs, and so on the last day of our life, may he deign to open for us the door to blessed eternity.

## APPENDIX ON THE COMING OF ST. PETER TO ROME

Although discussions on particular facts may be considered foreign to the historian, nevertheless the coming of St. Peter to Rome, which is one of the most important points in ecclesiastical history, being fervently contested by today's heretics, seems to me a matter of such importance that it should not be omitted.

This seems all the more appropriate because Protestants for some time in their books, newspapers, and conversations have sought to make it an object of reasoning, always with the aim of casting doubt on it and discrediting our holy Catholic religion. They do this to diminish, indeed to destroy, if they could, the authority of the Pope since they say that if Peter did not come to Rome, the Roman Pontiffs are not his successors, and therefore not heirs of his powers. But the efforts of the heretics only show how powerful the authority of the Pope is against them, and to free themselves from it, they are not ashamed to fabricate lies, distorting and denying history. We believe that this single fact will suffice to reveal the great malice that reigns among them, for to doubt the coming of St. Peter to Rome is the same as doubting whether there is light when the sun shines at high noon.

I find it appropriate to point out here that until the fourteenth century, over the span of about fourteen hundred years, there is not a single author, either Catholic or heretical, who has raised the slightest doubt about the coming of St. Peter to Rome. Also, we invite the adversaries to cite even one. The first to raise this doubt was Marsilius of Padua, who sold his pen to Emperor Louis the Bavarian, and both, one with arms, the other with perverse doctrines, unleashed themselves against the primacy of the Supreme Pontiff. This doubt, however, was considered ridiculous by all and vanished with the death of its author.

Two hundred years later, in the sixteenth century, the turbulent spirits of Luther and Calvin arose, and from their school came several who, surpassing the malice of their

own masters, sought to raise the same doubt to better deceive the simple and the ignorant. Anyone who is somewhat familiar with history knows what credit is due to one who, relying solely on his whim, contradicts a fact reported with unanimous consent by writers of all times and places. This single observation would suffice to make manifest the insubstantiality of such doubt. However, so that the reader may know the authors whose authority comes to confirm what we assert, we will cite a few. Since Protestants admit the authority of the Church of the first four centuries, we, eager to please them in all that is possible, will use writers who lived in that time. Some of them assert that Peter was in Rome, and others attest that he founded his episcopal seat there and suffered martyrdom there.

St. Clement Pope, a disciple of Saint Peter and his successor in the papacy, in his first letter written to the Corinthians, gives as public and certain the coming of Saint Peter to Rome, his long stay there, and the martyrdom suffered there along with St. Paul. Here are his words: "The example of these men, who, living holily, gathered a great multitude of the elect and suffered many tortures and torments, has remained excellent among us."

St. Ignatius the martyr, also a disciple of St. Peter and his successor in the bishopric of Antioch, being led to Rome to be martyred there, writes to the Romans begging them not to want to impede his martyrdom and says: "I beg you, I do not command you, as Peter and Paul did: *Non ut Petrus et Paulus praecipio vobis.*"

The same is affirmed by Papias, a contemporary of the aforementioned and a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, as can be seen in Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, Book 2, Chapter 15.

Not far from these, we have the illustrious testimonies of St. Irenaeus and St. Dionysius, who long knew and conversed with the disciples of the Apostles and were very well informed about the events that occurred within the Church of Rome.

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon and martyred in the year 202, attests that St. Matthew spread his Gospel to the Jews in their own language, while Peter and Paul preached in Rome and established the Church: *Petro et Paulo Romae evangelizantibus et constituentibus Ecclesiam*[\[34\]](#). After such testimonies, we do not know how the heretics dare to deny the coming of St. Peter to Rome. Almost at the same time flourished Clement of Alexandria, St. Caius, priest of Rome, Tertullian of Carthage, Origen, St. Cyprian, and many others, who all agree in reporting the great gathering of the faithful at the tomb of St. Peter martyred in Rome, and all, filled with reverence for the primacy enjoyed by the Church of Rome, say that from it one must expect the oracles of eternal salvation, because Jesus Christ has promised the preservation of the faith to its founder St. Peter[\[35\]](#).

And if from these writers we move to the luminaries of the Church, St. Peter of Alexandria, St. Asterius of Amasea, St. Optatus of Milevis, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Epiphanius, St. Maximus of Turin, St. Augustine, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and many others, we find their testimonies fully unanimous and concordant on the truth we assert: namely, that Peter was in Rome and suffered martyrdom there. St. Optatus, Bishop of Milevis in Africa, writing against the Donatists says: "You cannot deny, you know, that in the city of Rome the episcopal chair was held by Peter from the beginning." For the sake of brevity, we will only quote the words of the Doctor St. Jerome, who flourished in the 4th century of the Church. "Peter, prince of the Apostles," he writes, "went to Rome in the second year of Emperor Claudius, and there held the priestly chair until the last year of Nero. Buried in Rome in the Vatican, near the Via Trionfale, he is famous for the veneration that the universe pays him."[\[36\]](#)" Let us add the many martyrologies of the various Latin Churches that have come down to us from the most remote antiquity, the different Calendars of the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Syrians, the Menologion of the Greeks, the same liturgies of all the Christian Churches scattered in various

countries of Christendom, everywhere the truth of this account is recorded.

What more? The same Protestants, somewhat renowned in doctrine, such as Gave, Ammendo, Pearson, Grotius, Usher, Biondello, Scaliger, Basnage and Newton, along with many others, agree that the coming of the prince of the Apostles to Rome and his death in that metropolis of the universe is an indisputable fact.

It is true that neither the Acts of the Apostles nor St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans mention this fact. But besides the fact that accredited writers recognise in these authors a clear reference to such an event[\[37\]](#), we observe that the author of the Acts of the Apostles did not aim to write about the actions of St. Peter or the other Apostles, but only those of St. Paul, his companion and teacher, and this almost to make an apology for this Apostle of the Gentiles, the most despised and slandered by the Jews. Therefore, St. Luke, after narrating the beginnings of the Church from Chapter XVI to the end of his book, writes no more about others except for Paul and his missionary companions. In fact, in his Acts, Luke does not even recount all the things done by Paul, things we know only from the letters of this Apostle. Indeed, does he perhaps speak of the three shipwrecks suffered by his Master, the struggle he had to endure in Ephesus with the beasts, and other deeds mentioned in his Second Letter to the Corinthians and in that to the Galatians[\[38\]](#)? Does St. Luke perhaps speak of Paul's martyrdom, or even just of those things he did after his first imprisonment in Rome? Does he perhaps mention even one of the 14 letters? None of this. Now, what a wonder if the same writer remained silent about many things done by Peter, including his coming to Rome?

What we said about the silence of St. Luke applies to the silence of St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans. Paul, writing to the Romans, does not greet Peter. Thus, Protestants conclude that Peter was never in Rome. What a strange line of reasoning! At most, one could deduce that Peter was not in

Rome at that time, and no more than that. And who does not know that Peter, while holding the see of Rome, often left to go elsewhere to establish other Churches in various parts of Italy? Did he not do the same when he held his see in Jerusalem and Antioch? It was precisely during that time that he travelled to various parts of Palestine, and then to Asia Minor, Bithynia, Pontus, Galatia, and Cappadocia, to all of which he especially addressed his first letter. Therefore, it is not to be supposed that he did not do the same in Italy, which offered him a very abundant harvest. Moreover, that Peter was not only concerned with Rome in Italy is known from Eusebius, a 4th-century historian, who, writing about the main things he accomplished, expresses himself as follows: "The evidence of the things done by Peter is those very Churches that soon after shone, such as, for example, the Church of Caesarea in Palestine, that of Antioch in Syria, and the Church of the very city of Rome. It has been handed down to posterity that Peter himself established these Churches and all those surrounding them. And so also those in Egypt and the same Alexandria, although not by himself, but through Mark his disciple, while he was occupied in Italy and among the surrounding peoples.[\[39\]](#)"

Therefore, Paul in his Letter to the Romans does not greet Peter because he knew that at that time he was perhaps not in Rome. Certainly, if Peter had been there, he could have himself resolved the issue that arose among those faithful, which prompted Paul to write his famous letter.

And then, even if Peter had been in the city, it can well be said that Paul in his letter did not leave it to the faithful to greet him along with the others, because he had him greeted separately by the bearer of the same, or he wrote to him individually as we still do today with people of importance. Moreover, if Paul, writing to the Romans, did not have Peter greeted, it would prove that Peter was never in Rome, then we should also say that St. James the Less was never Bishop of Jerusalem, because Paul, writing to the Hebrews, does not greet him at all. Now, all antiquity

proclaims St. James as Bishop of Jerusalem. Therefore, Paul's silence does not conclude against the coming of St. Peter to Rome.

**Let us add:** if from the silence of Sacred Scripture regarding the coming of St. Peter to Rome it could reasonably be inferred that Peter did not come to Rome, then one could also argue this way: Sacred Scripture does not say that St. Peter died. Therefore, St. Peter is still alive, and you Protestants look for him in some corner of the earth.

There is also a reason for the silence of Sacred Scripture about the coming and death of St. Peter in Rome, and we do not want to keep it silent. That Peter is the head of the Church, the supreme pastor, the infallible teacher of all the faithful, and that these prerogatives should be passed down to his successors until the end of the world is a dogma of faith, and therefore it had to be revealed either through Sacred Scripture or through divine Tradition, as it was. But that he came and died in Rome is a historical fact, a fact that could be seen with the eyes, touched with the hands; and therefore a testimony from Sacred Scripture was not necessary to ascertain it, as those proofs that announce and confirm to man all other facts were sufficient for this. Protestants who claim to deny the coming of St. Peter to Rome because it cannot be proven with biblical arguments fall into ridicule. What would they themselves say of someone who denied the coming and death of Emperor Augustus in the city of Nola because Scripture does not say so? If we want to dwell on this silence of the Acts of the Apostles and the Letter of St. Paul, let us say that this does not prove anything for us or for the Protestants. Because sound logic and simple natural reason teach us that when seeking the truth of a fact omitted by an author, one must seek among others who are responsible for speaking about it. This is what we have abundantly done.

We are also aware that Josephus Flavius does not speak of this coming of St. Peter to Rome, nor does he speak of St. Paul. But what does it matter to him to speak of Christians? His purpose was to write the history of the Jewish

people and the Jewish war, not the particular events that occurred elsewhere. He does speak of Jesus Christ, of St. John the Baptist, of St. James, whose death occurred in Palestine. But does he perhaps speak of St. Paul, of St. Andrew, or of the other Apostles, who were crowned with martyrdom outside of Palestine? And does he not himself say that he intends to pass over many events that occurred in his time in silence[\[40\]](#)?

Moreover, is it not foolish to trust more in a Jew who does not speak than in the early Christians who all unanimously proclaim that St. Peter died in Rome, after having dwelt there for many years?

We do not want to omit the difficulty that some raise about the disagreement of writers in fixing the year of St. Peter's coming to Rome. Because in our times, scholars commonly agree on the chronology we follow. But we say that this disagreement among ancient writers demonstrates the truth of the fact: it shows that one writer did not copy from another, that each used those documents or those memories that he had in their respective countries and that were publicly known as certain. Nor should we be surprised by such chronological disagreement (which is one or two years more or less) in those remote times when each nation had its own way of counting the years. But all these authors frankly refer to such coming of St. Peter to Rome and mention the minute circumstances regarding his dwelling and death in that city.

Those who are against the coming of St. Peter to Rome also add: in the first letter of St. Peter to the faithful of Asia, it is implied that he was in Babylon. Thus, he expresses himself in his greetings: "The Church in Babylon sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark." Therefore, his coming to Rome is impossible. Let us begin by saying that even if Babylon, of which Peter speaks, were intended to mean the metropolis of Assyria, it could still not be assumed that he could not have come, and did not come to Rome. His pontificate was very long, and critics agree in saying that the aforementioned letter was written before the year 43, or around that time. In fact, he still greets the faithful in the



name of Mark, who we know from Eusebius was sent by Peter to establish the Church of Alexandria in the year 43 of Jesus Christ. It follows that Peter, from the date of his letter until his death, had at least another 24 years of life. In such a long interval of time, could he not have made the journey to Rome?

But we have another answer to give; and that is that Peter spoke metaphorically and with the name of Babylon he meant the city of Rome, where he was indeed writing his letter. This is derived from all antiquity. Papias, a disciple of the Apostles, clearly states that Peter showed that he wrote his first letter in Rome, while by a transliteration of the word he gives it the name of Babylon[\[41\]](#). St. Jerome similarly says that Peter, in his first letter, under the name of Babylon signified the city of Rome: *Petrus in epistola prima sub nomine Babylonis figurative Romam significans, salutat vos, inquit, ecclesia quae est in Babylone collecta*[\[42\]](#). Nor was this language unusual among Christians. St. John gives Rome the same name of Babylon. In his Apocalypse, after calling Rome the city of the seven hills, the great city that reigns over the kings of the earth, he announces its fall, writing: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great."[\[43\]](#) Indeed, it was quite right for Rome to be called a Babylon, because it contained within itself all the errors spread in the various parts of the world that it dominated.

Moreover, Peter had good reasons to keep the literal name of the place from which he was writing silent, because having just escaped from the hands of Herod Agrippa, and knowing how there was a close friendship between this king and Emperor Claudius, he could justly fear some ambush from these two enemies of the Christian name, should his letter have gone astray. To avoid this danger, therefore, prudence dictated that he use a word known to Christians and unknown to the Jews and Gentiles in his writing. Thus he did.

In addition, from Peter's own words, another proof of his coming to Rome can be derived. In fact, Peter, concluding his letter, says: "The Church sends you its

greetings ... and so does my son Mark.” Therefore, Mark was with Peter. This being said, all tradition unanimously proclaims that Mark, Peter’s spiritual son, his disciple, his interpreter, and I would say his secretary, was in Rome and in this city wrote the Gospel that he heard preached by the same Master [\[44\]](#). Therefore, it is necessary to also admit that Peter was in Rome with the disciple.

Now we can come to this conclusion. For the period of fourteen hundred years, there was never anyone who raised the slightest doubt against the coming of St. Peter to Rome. On the contrary, we have a long series of men celebrated for holiness and doctrine, who from apostolic times until our days have always accepted it with their authority. The liturgies, the martyrologies, the very enemies of Christianity agree with the majority of Protestants on this fact.

Therefore, you, Oh Protestants of today, opposing the coming of St. Peter to Rome, oppose all antiquity, you oppose the authority of the most learned and pious men of past times. You oppose the martyrologies, the menologies, the liturgies, the calendars of antiquity. You oppose what your own teachers wrote.

Oh, Protestants, open your eyes. Listen to the words of a friend who speaks to you moved solely by the desire for your good. Many claim to be your guides in the truth, but either out of malice or ignorance, they deceive you. Listen to the voice of God calling you to His fold, under the care of the supreme pastor established by Him. Abandon every commitment, overcome the obstacle of human respect, renounce the errors into which deluded men have plunged you. Return to the religion of your ancestors, which some of your forebears abandoned. Invite all the followers of the Reformation to listen to what Tertullian said in his time: “Therefore, Oh Christian, if you want to secure yourself in the great matter of salvation, resort to the Churches founded by the Apostles. Go to Rome, whence our authority emanates. Oh happy Church, where with their blood they shed all their doctrine, where Peter suffered a martyrdom similar to the passion of his

Divine Master, where Paul was crowned with martyrdom by having his head cut off, where John, after being immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil, suffered nothing and was therefore exiled to the island of Patmos.[\[45\]](#)“

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[\[1\]](#) The news regarding the life of Saint Peter derives from the Gospel, the Acts, and some letters of the Apostles, as well as from various other authors, whose memories are referred to by Caesar Baronius in the first volume of his annals, by the Bollandists on January 18, February 22, June 29, August 1, and elsewhere. The life of Saint Peter has been extensively treated by Antonio Cesari in the Acts of the Apostles and also in a separate volume, Luigi Cuccagni in three substantial volumes, and many others.

[\[2\]](#) Saint Ambrose, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, book 4.

[\[3\]](#) Saint Ambrose, cited work.

[\[4\]](#) Saint Jerome, Against Jovinian, Chapter 1, 26.

[\[5\]](#) Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 16.

[\[6\]](#) Genesis, Chapter 41.

[\[7\]](#) Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 18.

[\[8\]](#) Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 15.

[\[9\]](#) Saint John Damascene, Homily on the Transfiguration.

[\[10\]](#) Saint John Chrysostom, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.

[\[11\]](#) The transfer of “gate” for “power,” thus the sign for what is signified, derives from the fact that in ancient law and among Eastern peoples, princes and judges generally exercised their legislative and judicial power at the city gates (see III, p. XXII, 2). Moreover, this part of the city was kept in a continuous state of garrison and fortification, so that, once the gates were taken, the rest was easily conquered. Even today, it is said “Ottoman Gate” or “Sublime Gate” to indicate the power of the Turks.

[\[12\]](#) Saint Jerome, Against Jovinian, Chapter 1, 26.

[\[13\]](#) Saint Augustine, On the Unity of the Church.

[\[14\]](#) Saint Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book III, n. 3.

[\[15\]](#) Psalms 68, 108.

[\[16\]](#) Gospel according to John, 14, 12.

[\[17\]](#) See Saint Basil of Seleucia and the Recognitions of Saint Clement.

[\[18\]](#) See Theodoret, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Clement, etc.

[\[19\]](#) Benedict XIV, On the Beatification of the Servants of God, Book I, Chapter I.

[\[20\]](#) Letter to the Romans, Chapter I.

[\[21\]](#) Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book II, Chapter 15.

[\[22\]](#) First Letter of Peter, Chapter 5.

[\[23\]](#) Saint Pacian, Letter 2.

[\[24\]](#) The holy Fathers who recount the story of Simon Magus, among others, are: Saint Maximus of Turin, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Saint Sulpicius Severus, Saint Gregory of Tours, Saint Clement Pope, Saint Basil of Seleucia, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome, and many others.

[\[25\]](#) Lactantius, Book 4.

[\[26\]](#) Epistle 2, Chapter 3.

[\[27\]](#) Scholars' opinions vary in determining the year of the martyrdom of the Prince of the Apostles, but the most likely is the one that assigns it to the year 67 of the common era. In fact, Saint Jerome, an indefatigable investigator and knower of sacred things, informs us that Saint Peter and Saint Paul were martyred two years after the death of Seneca, Nero's teacher. Now, from Tacitus, a historian of those times, we know that the consuls under whom Seneca died were Silio Nerva and Attico Vestino, who held the consulship in the year 65. Therefore, the two Apostles suffered martyrdom in 67. This count of years, for which martyrdom is fixed at that time, corresponds to the 25 years and almost two months during which Saint Peter held his See in Rome, a number of years that has always been recognised by all antiquity (see "Historical-Chronological Observations" by Monsignor Domenico Bartolini, Cardinal of the Holy Church: "Whether the year 67 of the common era is the year of the martyrdom of the glorious Princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul," Rome, Tipografia Scalvini, 1866).

[\[28\]](#) The chain with which Saint Peter was bound is still preserved in Rome in the church known as Saint Peter in Chains (Artano, *"Life of Saint Peter"*).

[29] On the highest point of the Janiculum Hill, where Ancus Marcius, the fourth king of Rome, founded the Janiculum Fortress, the Church of Saint Peter in Montorio was built, at the place where the holy Apostle completed his martyrdom. This hill was called Janiculum because it was dedicated to Janus, the guardian of the gates, which in Latin are called *ianuae*. It is believed that Janus, who built that part of Rome facing the Capitol, was also buried here. It was also called the Golden Mountain, from the nearby and ancient Aurelia Gate. Now it is called Montorio, or Mount of Gold, from the yellow colour of the earth that covers this hill, one of the seven hills of ancient Rome (see Moroni, "Churches of Saint Peter").

[30] Bollandists, June 29.

[31] Saint Ephrem the Syrian.

[32] See Emanuele Square.

[33] See Saint Gregory the Great, Epistle 30. Baronius in the year 284.

[34] Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 1.

[35] Caius Romanus in Eusebius; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, book 7; Tertullian, *On Persecutions*; Origen in Eusebius, book 3; Saint Cyprian, Letter 52 to Antonian and Letter 55 to Cornelius.

[36] Saint Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, Chapter 1.

[37] Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus, a very knowledgeable man in ecclesiastical history, who died in the year 450, commenting on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, where the Apostle writes: "I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you" (Romans 1,11), adds that Paul did not say he wanted to confirm them except because the great Saint Peter had already first communicated the Gospel to them: "Because Peter first gave them the evangelical doctrine,

he necessarily added 'to confirm you'" (Commentary on the Letter to the Romans).

[38] 1 Corinthians 11:23-24; Galatians 1:17-18.

[39] See Theophany.

[40] Jewish Antiquities, Book 20, Chapter 5.

[41] In Eusebius, Book II, 14.

[42] Saint Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*.

[43] Revelation 17:5; 18:2.

[44] See Saint Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, Chapter 8.

[45] Tertullian, *On the Prescription of Heretics*, Chapter 36.

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## The Jubilee and devout practises for visiting churches. Dialogue

*Saint John Bosco fully understood the importance of Jubilees in the life of the Church. If, in 1850, due to various historical events, it had not been possible to celebrate the Jubilee, Pope Pius IX proclaimed an extraordinary one on the occasion of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 1854). This Jubilee lasted six months, from December 8, 1854, to June 8, 1855. Don Bosco did not miss the opportunity and published, precisely in 1854, the volume "The Jubilee and Devout Practises for Visiting Churches".*

*With the promulgation of the Encyclical "Quanta Cura" and the "Syllabus of Errors" Pope Pius IX proclaimed another*

*extraordinary Jubilee, again lasting six months, from December 8, 1864, to June 8, 1865. On that occasion, Don Bosco proposed, in the Catholic Readings, the "Dialogues on the Institution of the Jubilee".*

*In view of the ordinary Jubilee of 1875, Don Bosco republished his text under the title "The Jubilee of 1875, its Institution and Devout Practises for Visiting Churches," always attentive to offering the faithful a guide for these celebrations rich with extraordinary graces.*

*Here follows the latest version, dated 1875.*

## **DIALOGUE I. About the Jubilee in general**

*Giuliano* – I greet you, Mr. Provost, I am here to ask you to practise a bit of patience.

*Provost* – Welcome, dear Giuliano, I am always pleased when you come to see me, and, as I have said several times, I am always at your beck and call in everything I can do for the spiritual benefit of all my parishioners and especially for you, who, having recently approached the Catholic faith, have a greater need to be instructed on many things.

*Giul.* – I have been told that the Pope has granted the Jubilee. I have never done it before, and I would like to be instructed on how to do it well.

*Prov.* – You wisely thought to seek being instructed in time, because since you became a Catholic, no Jubilee has ever taken place. In the circumstance of your renunciation, since you have never spoken about this practise of the Catholic Church, there is great concern that you have quite a few errors in your mind. Therefore, tell me what you want to know most, and I will try to satisfy you by making any observations that I think will be useful for your spiritual benefit.

*Giul.* – First of all, I would need you to tell me in an easy and clear manner what the word Jubilee means and what sense Catholics give to it, because unfortunately when I was Protestant, I heard all kinds of things being said against



the Jubilee and against Indulgences.

*Prov.* – Two things, dear Giuliano, you desire from me: the explanation of the word Jubilee, and in what sense it is perceived by us as a religious practise proposed by the Catholic Church.

As for the meaning of the word, I do not need to dwell too long, for it is sufficient for us to know, what is intended with this term. However, I will cite the main explanations given by our holy Fathers.

St. Jerome and others say that the word Jubilee derives from *Iubal*, the inventor of musical instruments, or from *Iobel*, which means horn, because the year of Jubilee among the Jews was proclaimed with a trumpet made in the shape of a ram's horn.

Some others claim Jubilee originates from the word *Habil*, which means to restore with joy, because in that year the things bought, lent, or pawned were returned to the first owner, and this brought great joy.

Others say that the word Jubilee derives from *Iobil*, which also means joy, because on these occasions good Christians have serious reasons to rejoice for the spiritual treasures they can enrich themselves with.

*Giul.* – This is the explanation of the word Jubilee in general, but I would like to know how it is defined by the Church as a practise of piety, to which Indulgences are attached.

*Prov.* – I will gladly satisfy you. The Jubilee, recognised as a practise established by the Church, is a plenary Indulgence granted by the Supreme Pontiff to the universal Church with full remission of all sins to those who worthily acquire it by fulfilling the prescribed actions.

First of all, *Plenary Indulgence*, is called as such to distinguish it from partial Indulgence, which is usually granted by the Supreme Pontiffs for certain practises of Christian piety, certain prayers, and certain acts of religion.

This Indulgence is called extraordinary because it

is usually granted only rarely and in serious cases, such as when wars, plagues, and earthquakes threaten. The Supreme Pontiff Pius IX grants in this year the ordinary Jubilee, which usually occurs every twenty-five years, in order to encourage Christian faithful from all over the world to pray for the present needs of religion and especially for the conversion of sinners, for the uprooting of heresies, and to remove many errors that some seek to spread among the faithful through writings, books, or other means that, sadly, the devil knows how to suggest to the detriment of souls.

*Giul.* – I am very pleased with the definition you have given me of the Jubilee, but it is called by such a variety of names that I remain quite confused – Holy Year, centenary year, secular, jubilar, particular Jubilee, universal Jubilee, great Jubilee, Indulgence in the form of Jubilee – these are the names by which I hear the Jubilee called promiscuously. Please be kind enough to explain them to me.

*Prov.* – These names, although sometimes used to express the same thing, nevertheless have meanings that are somewhat different from one another. – I will give you a brief explanation.

The Jubilee is called Jubilar Year, Holy Year because in that year (as I will tell you later) the Jews were to cease from all kinds of work and occupy themselves exclusively in works of virtue and holiness. So, all Christian faithful are equally invited, without being obliged to abandon their ordinary temporal occupations. It is also called centenary or hundredth year because for its first institution, it was celebrated every one hundred years.

The Jubilee is called partial when it is granted only in certain designated places, as would be in Rome, or in Santiago de Compostela in Spain. This Jubilee is also called general when it is granted to the faithful in every place of Christendom.

Yet, it is properly called General Jubilee or Great Jubilee when it is celebrated in the year fixed by the

Church. For the Jews, it occurred every fifty years. Among Christians, in the beginning, it was every hundred years, then every fifty, and now every twenty-five.

The Jubilee is called extraordinary and also Indulgence in the form of Jubilee when, for some serious reason, it is granted outside the holy year.

The Supreme Pontiffs, when they are elevated to their dignity, usually solemnise this event with a plenary Indulgence, or an extraordinary Jubilee.

The difference between the great Jubilee and the particular Jubilee lies in the fact that the former lasts a whole year, while the latter lasts only part of the year. For example, the one that reigning Pius IX granted in 1865 lasted only three months, but the same favours of the present Jubilee, which lasts for the whole year of 1875, were attached to it.

The brief explanation I have given you of these words, I believe will be even better clarified by the other things that I hope to be able to present to you in other discussions. In the meantime, oh beloved Giuliano, rest assured that the Jubilee is a great treasure for Christians, so much so that the learned Cardinal Gaetani in his treatise on the Jubilee (c. 15) wrote these beautiful words: "Blessed is that people which knows what the Jubilee is; wretched are those who, through negligence or inconsideration, neglect it with the hope of reaching another one." (Those who wish for more detailed information on what has been briefly mentioned above may consult: MORONI: Holy Year and Jubilee – BERGIER article Jubilee – The work: *Magnum theatrum vitae humanae article Iubileum*. – NAVARRO *de Iubileo* note 1° Benzonio book 3, chap 4. Vittorelli – Turrecremata – Sarnelli tom. X. St. Isidore in the *Origins* book 5.).

## **DIALOGUE II. The Jubilee among the Jews**

*Giul.* – I have listened with pleasure to what you have told me about the various meanings that are usually given to the word Jubilee, and about the great advantages that can

derive from it. But this is not enough for me, if I have to give a response to my former companions in religion. This is because, using the Bible alone as the norm of their faith, they are set in asserting that the Jubilee is a novelty in the Church, of which there is no trace in the Bible. Therefore, I would like to be instructed on this matter.

*Prov.* – When your ancient ministers and companions in religion asserted that the sacred Scripture does not speak of Jubilee, they sought to hide the truth from you, or they themselves were unaware of it.

However, before I explain to you what the Bible says about the Jubilee, I must point out to you how there is in the Catholic Church an infallible authority that comes from God and is directed by God Himself. This is evident from many texts of Sacred Scripture and especially from the words spoken by the Saviour to Saint Peter when he established him as head of the Church, saying: – “Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (*St. Matthew* 18). Therefore, we can confidently accept everything that this authority establishes for the good of Christians without fear of error. Moreover, it is a maxim accepted by all Catholics that when we encounter some truth believed and practised at all times in the Church, and there is no time or place in which it has been instituted, we must believe it as revealed by God Himself and transmitted in words or in writings from the beginning of the Church to our days.

*Giul.* – I believe this too. This is because, given the infallible authority of the Church, it does not matter whether it proposes things written in the Bible or transmitted by tradition. However, I would greatly like to know what is in the Bible regarding the Jubilee, and I desire this all the more because a short time ago an old Protestant friend of mine began to mock me about the novelty of the Jubilee, of which, he said, there is no mention in the Bible.

*Prov.* – I am ready to satisfy this just desire of yours. Let us open the Bible together and read here in the book of Leviticus in Chapter XXV, and we will find the

institution of the Jubilee, as it was practised among the Jews.

The sacred text says this:

“You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, that gives forty-nine years; and on the tenth day of the seventh month –on the day of atonement– you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. In this year of jubilee, you shall return, every one of you, to your property”.

To this point these are the words of Leviticus, concerning which I believe that no lengthy explanation is needed to make you understand how ancient the institution of the Jubilee is, that is, since the earliest times when the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land, around the year 2500 of that world.

The Jubilee is also mentioned in many other places in the Bible; as in the same book of Leviticus, in Chapter XXVII; in the book of Numbers, in Chapter XXXVI, in that of Joshua in Chapter VI. But let it suffice what we have said, which is extremely clear in itself.

*Giul.* – I was very pleased to see these words from the Bible, and I rejoice greatly that the Bible not only speaks of the Jubilee, but commands its observance to all the Jews. I would like you to explain to me somewhat extensively the words of the sacred text, to know what purpose God had in commanding the Jubilee.

*Prov.* – From the Bible it is clear what purpose God had in commanding Moses to observe the Jubilee. First of all, God, who is all charity, wanted that people to become accustomed to being kind and merciful to their neighbours.

Therefore, in the year of Jubilee, all debts were forgiven. Those who had sold or mortgaged houses, vineyards, fields, or other things, in that year regained everything as first owners. Exiles returned to their homeland, and slaves were set free without any ransom. In this way, the rich were prevented from making excessive purchases, the poor could preserve the inheritance of their ancestors, and slavery, so practised in those times among pagan nations, was prevented. Moreover, since the people had to cease from temporal occupations, they could freely devote an entire year to matters concerning divine worship, and thus rich and poor, slaves and masters united in one heart and one soul to bless and thank the Lord for the benefits received.

*Giul.* – Perhaps this is not appropriate, but I have a doubt: if in the year of Jubilee no sowing was done, nor were the fruits of the fields gathered, what could the people eat?

*Prov.* – On that occasion, that is, in the year of Jubilee, an extraordinary event occurred, which is a true miracle. In the previous year, the Lord made the earth produce such an abundance of all kinds of fruits that was enough for the entire year 49 and 50 and part of 51. In this, we must admire the goodness of God, who, while commanding us to occupy ourselves with things concerning His divine worship, thinks of everything we may need for our bodies. This maxim was later confirmed several times in the Gospel, especially when Jesus Christ said: Do not worry about tomorrow, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' Rather, strive first for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well".

*Giul.* – Another doubt arises in this moment: is the year of Jubilee still preceded by that abundance in some place on earth?

*Prov.* – No, oh Giuliano, the material abundance of the Jewish Jubilee lasted among that people only until the coming of the Messiah. From then on, having fulfilled what the

ancient Jubilee foreshadowed, that material abundance ceased to give way to the abundance of graces and blessings that Christians can enjoy in the holy Catholic Religion.

*Giul.* – I am very satisfied with what you have told me. (On this matter, one can consult CALMET DELL' AQUILA Great Dictionary of the Holy Bible under the article Jubilee. – MENOCHIO: On the fiftieth year of the Jubilee of the Jews).

### **DIALOGUE III. The Jubilee among Christians**

*Giul.* – I will try to remember how the Jubilee was practised among the Jews, and how it is a source of heavenly blessings in determined times. Now I would also like to know if there is mention of Jubilee in the New Testament, because if there is any text on this matter, the Protestants are in a bind and will have to agree that Catholics practise the Jubilee according to the Gospel.

*Prov.* – Although it should suffice for every Christian that a truth is recorded anywhere in the Bible for it to be a rule of faith for him or her, in this case we can be abundantly satisfied with the authority of the Old and the New Testaments.

St. Luke in Chapter four (v. 19) recounts the following event about the Saviour. When Jesus went to Nazareth, His homeland, the Bible was presented to Him so that He could explain some passages to the people. He opened the book of the prophet Isaiah and among other things applied the following words to Himself: The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance.

From these words, oh Giuliano, you know how the Saviour recalls the ancient Jubilee, which was entirely material, and dignifies it in a moral sense, saying that He proclaimed the true year of retribution, a pleasant year in which through His miracles, with His passion and death, He would give true freedom to the peoples enslaved by sin with the abundance of graces and blessings that are found in the

Christian religion (see MARTINI in St. Luke).

Also, St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians speaks of this acceptable time, the time of salvation and sanctification (c. 6, 2).

From these words and from other facts of the New Testament, we conclude: 1) that the ancient Jubilee, which was entirely material, has in fact passed into the new law, as entirely spiritual; 2) the freedom that the people of God granted to the slaves symbolised the complete liberation that we will acquire by the grace of God, by which we are freed from the harsh slavery of the devil; 3) that the year of retribution, or Jubilee, was confirmed in the Gospel, received by the Church and practised according to the needs of the faithful, and as the opportunities of the times allowed.

*Giul.* – I am increasingly convinced of a truth that I firmly believe, because it is recorded in the Old and the New Testaments. Now I would like to know how this religious practise has been preserved in the Catholic Church.

*Prov.* – This is a matter of great importance, and I will try to satisfy you. Since the year of Jubilee among the Jews was a year of remission and forgiveness, so it was also established the year of Jubilee among Christians, in which great indulgences, that is, remission and forgiveness of sins, are granted. Hence, it happened that the year of Jubilee among Christians was called a *holy year*, both for the many works of piety that Christians usually perform in that year as well as for the great heavenly favours that in such a circumstance everyone can procure.

*Giul.* – That is not what I meant to say. I would like to hear about the way in which this Jubilee was introduced among Christians.

*Prov.* – To understand how the Jubilee was introduced and preserved among Christians, I must point out a religious belief followed since the early days of the Church. It consisted of a great veneration that in the Jubilee year – called in the Gospel as the year of retribution, and by St. Paul as the acceptable year, the time of salvation, one could



obtain a plenary indulgence, or the remission of all gratification due to God for sins. It is believed that the first Jubilee was granted by the holy Apostles themselves in the year 50 of the common era (see Scaligero and Petavius).

The first Popes, who succeeded St. Peter in governing the Church, continued to keep this religious practise alive, granting great favours to those who at certain times went to Rome to visit the Church where the body of St. Peter was buried (see Rutilius, De Iubileo. Laurea, Navarro, Vittorelli and others).

For it was always the belief among Christians, even in the early centuries, that by visiting the Church of St. Peter in the Vatican, where the body of that Prince of the Apostles was buried, one could gain extraordinary spiritual favours, which we call indulgences.

The heavenly favours that were hoped for, the great respect that all Catholics had for the glorious St. Peter, the desire to visit the Church, the chains, and the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, drew people from all parts of the world. In certain years, one could see old, young, rich, and poor departing from very distant lands, overcoming the greatest hardships of the roads to get to Rome, fully convinced of obtaining great indulgences.

St. Gregory the Great, wishing to support the religious spirit among Christians, and at the same time wanting to regulate their frequent gatherings in Rome, in the Sixth Century established that every hundred years one could gain the plenary indulgence, or Jubilee, from all those who in the secular year, also called the holy year, went to Rome to visit the Vatican Basilica, where the Prince of the Apostles was buried.

*Giul.* – Here I encounter a difficulty. I have read in some small books that the Jubilee was instituted only in the year 1300 by a Pope named Boniface VIII, and according to what you say, it would be much further back in time.

*Prov.* – I also know that there are some printed booklets which assert that Boniface VIII was the originator of

the Jubilee. However, what they say is inaccurate, because this Pope was rather the first to publish the holy year with a Bull, that is, the plenary indulgence of the Jubilee. Yet, in this very Bull, he assures that he did nothing but establish in writing what was already universally practised among Christians.

#### **DIALOGUE IV. First solemn publication of the Jubilee, or holy year**

*Giul.* – This first publication of the Jubilee or the holy year is such a serious and solemn matter that I would like to hear it recounted with the most notable circumstances.

*Prov.* – Since you like stories, I think it appropriate to explain the reasons that led Pope Boniface VIII to solemnly publish a Bull regarding the first solemn Jubilee. – It was the year 1300 when an extraordinary number of people from the Roman State and abroad flocked to Rome in such large numbers that it seemed as if the gates of Heaven had opened there. At the beginning of January, there was such a crowd of people in the streets of that city that one could hardly walk. Moved by this fact, the Pope commanded that everything possible be sought regarding this in ancient records. Then he called some of the oldest people who had come there to find out what had moved them. Among these was a noble and wealthy Savoyard aged one hundred and seven years. The Pope himself, in the presence of several Cardinals, wanted to question him accordingly: How old are you? – One hundred and seven. – Why have you come to Rome? – To gain the great Indulgences. – Who told you? – My father. – When? – One hundred years ago my father took me with him to Rome, and told me that every hundred years in Rome one could obtain great Indulgences, and that if I were still alive a hundred years later, I should not neglect to visit the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles.

After this man, others, both old and young from various nations, were also brought in, who, when questioned by the same Supreme Pontiff, all agreed in asserting that they had always understood that by visiting the Basilica of St.

Peter every secular year, they would earn great Indulgences with the remission of all sins. In view of that universal and constant belief, the Pope promulgated a Bull confirming what had been practised until then by oral tradition. A writer of those times, familiar with Pope Boniface, assures that he heard that Pope say that he was moved to publish his Bull by the belief spread and accepted throughout the Christian world, namely that since the birth of Christ, a great Indulgence was usually granted every secular year (Cardinal John Monaco).

*Giul.* – Since I see that you have read a lot, bring me some excerpts from that Bull, so that I can be well-instructed about this universal practise of the Church.

*Prov.* – It would be too long to report it all. I will convey to you the beginning, and I believe that will suffice for you. Here are the words of the Pope: “An ancient and faithful tradition of men who lived a long time ago assures that to those who come to visit the honourable Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles in Rome, great Indulgences and remission of sins are granted. We therefore, who by the duty of our office desire and strive with all our heart to procure the salvation of souls, by our apostolic authority approve and confirm all the mentioned Indulgences, and renew them by authenticating them with this our writing”. After this, the Pope explains the reasons that led him to grant such Indulgences, and what obligations must be fulfilled by those who wish to acquire them.

Once the Bull of the Pope was known, it is incredible the enthusiasm that arose from every place to make the pilgrimage to Rome. From France, from England, from Spain, from Germany, pilgrims of every age and condition, nobles and sovereigns came in crowds. The number of foreigners in Rome reached up to two million at the same time. This would have caused a serious famine if the Pope had not provided in a timely manner for the needs by bringing food from other countries.

*Giul.* – Now I understand very well how ancient the practise of the Jubilee is in the Church, but what we

celebrate today seems very different to me, both because it is spoken of more often, and because one no longer goes to Rome to acquire it.

*Prov.* – You make an appropriate observation. In this regard, I will tell you that the Jubilee, according to the Bull of Pope Boniface, was to take place every hundred years. But since such a span of time is too long and human life is too short for everyone to benefit from it, it was reduced by a Pope named Clement VI to every fifty years, just as it was for the Jews. Then another Pope named Gregory XI restricted it to every thirty-three years in memory of the thirty-three years of the Saviour's life. Finally, Pope Paul II, to ensure that even those who die young could acquire the Indulgence of the Jubilee, established that it should take place every twenty-five years. Hence, it has been practised accordingly in the Church until today. Furthermore, the obligation to go to Rome prevented many from benefiting from the spiritual favours of the Jubilee, either due to distance, age, or illness. For this reason, the Roman Pontiffs granted the same Indulgence, but instead of the obligation of going to Rome, they usually impose some obligations to be fulfilled by those who wish to make the holy Jubilee.

We have already recorded 20 holy years throughout ecclesiastical history, that is, twenty years in which the favour of the Jubilee was published by the Popes at different times.

The last of these was celebrated by Leo XII in the year 1825. It was also supposed to be published in the year 1850, but the public turmoil of that time did not allow it to be done. Now we are celebrating that of the Supreme Pontiff Pius IX, which is truly the holy year of 1875.

*Giul.* – Why was the present Jubilee granted by the Pope?

*Prov.* – What the Pope has granted at present is an ordinary Jubilee. The reasons for this Jubilee are the conversion of sinners, particularly heretics, peace among Christian princes and the triumph of the holy Catholic

Religion over heresy. In addition, the Holy Father has also proposed the goal of obtaining from God particular insights for understanding many erroneous propositions that have been spreading among the faithful for some time, gravely damaging faith and having the danger of eternal damnation for many. The Pope in his Encyclical explains the reasons for his actions. Finally, he prescribes the works to be performed to acquire the holy Indulgences.

*Giul.* – Do you think, Mr. Provost, that religious matters are going so badly? Heretics convert from time to time in large numbers to the Catholic Religion. Catholicism triumphs and progresses greatly in foreign missions.

*Prov.* – This is true, my good Giuliano, that the Catholic Religion prospers greatly in foreign missions. It is also true that in recent years, many Jews, heretics, particularly Protestants, have renounced their errors to embrace the holy Catholic Religion, and precisely for these advances, the devil makes all his efforts to sustain and spread heresy and impiety. Moreover, in so many ways religion is despised today in public and private, in speeches, in newspapers, in books! There is no holy and venerable thing that is not targeted and criticised and mocked. Take this: I give you the letter that the Pope writes to all the Bishops of Christendom. Read it at your convenience. In it, the efforts that hell makes against the Church in these times are mentioned, what favours can be enjoyed in the circumstance of the Jubilee, and what things must be done to acquire them. In the meantime, you should keep in mind that the Jubilee was a divine institution. It was God who commanded it to Moses. This institution passed on to Christians and was practised in the early days of the Church with some modifications, until Boniface VIII established it regularly with a Bull. Other Popes then reduced it to the form in which it is observed today. Therefore, we practise something commanded by God, and we do it because it is ordained by the Church for our particular needs. Thus, we should be eager to take advantage of it and profess feelings of utmost gratitude towards God,

who in so many ways shows His lively desire that we take advantage of His favours and think of the salvation of our souls. Plus, at the same time, we must profess a lively veneration for the Vicar of Jesus Christ, fulfilling with the utmost diligence what He prescribes, in order to procure for ourselves the heavenly favours (For more extensive information on the aforementioned, see Cardinal GAETANI: *Dell'anno centesimo* [On the Hundredth Year]. – MANNI: *Storia dell'anno santo* [History of the Holy Year] – ZACCARIA: *Dell'Anno Santo Trattato* [On the Holy Year]).

## **DIALOGUE V. On Indulgences**

*Giul.* – We are at a difficult point, of which I have always heard my ancient heretic companions speak ill, I mean, that of Indulgences. Therefore, I would like to be instructed about them, smoothing out those difficulties that will present themselves to my mind.

*Prov.* – I am not surprised that your ancient companions in heresy have spoken and still speak with disdain of the Indulgences, because the Protestants used the Indulgences as a pretext to separate from the Catholic Church. When you, my Julian, have a proper understanding of the Indulgences, you will certainly be satisfied, and you will bless divine mercy, which offers us such an easy means to gain divine treasures.

*Giul.* – Please explain to me what these Indulgences are, and I will strive to derive benefit from them.

*Prov.* – To help you understand what Indulgence means, it is good to remember how sin produces two bitter effects in our soul: the *guilt* that deprives us of grace and friendship with God, and the *punishment* that follows, which prevents entry into paradise. This punishment is of two kinds: eternal and temporal. Guilt, together with eternal punishment, is totally remitted through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Penance, provided that we approach it with the right dispositions. Since the temporal punishment

is not always completely remitted in the abovementioned Sacrament, it remains to be satisfied in this life through good works and penance, or in the next life through the fire of purgatory. It is on this truth that the severe canonical penances were founded, which the Church imposed on repentant sinners in the early centuries. Three, seven, ten, up to fifteen and twenty years of fasting on bread and water, of deprivations and humiliations, sometimes for an entire lifetime. This is what the Church imposed for a single sin, and it did not believe that those satisfactions exceeded the measure of what the sinner owed to the justice of God. And who can measure the injury that guilt does to the supreme God and the malice of sin? Who can penetrate the profound eternal secrets and know how much divine justice requires from us in this life to satisfy our debts? How long will we have to stay in the fire of purgatory? In order to shorten the time we would have to remain in that place of purification and alleviate the penance we should do in the present life, there are the treasures of holy Indulgences. And these are like a substitute for the severe canonical penances which, for many years, and sometimes for an entire lifetime, as I said, the Church used to inflict on repentant sinners.

*Giul.* – It seems reasonable to me that after the forgiveness of sin, divine justice still requires satisfaction through some penance; but what exactly are the Indulgences?

*Prov.* – Indulgences are the remission of the temporal punishment due for our sins, which is done through the spiritual treasures entrusted by God to the Church.

*Giul.* – What are these spiritual treasures of the Church?

*Prov.* – These spiritual treasures are the infinite merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, those of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, as we profess in the Apostles' Creed when we say: *I believe in the Communion of Saints*. Since the merits of Jesus Christ are infinite, the merits of the Most Holy Mary, who, conceived without sin and lived without sin, owed nothing to divine justice for her sins. Also, there are

Martyrs and other Saints, who satisfied more than was necessary for their own account through their sufferings, in union with those of Jesus Christ. All these satisfactions before God are like an inexhaustible treasure, which the Roman Pontiff dispenses according to the opportunity of the times and according to the needs of Christians.

*Giul.* – Here we reach a great difficulty: Sacred Scripture does not speak to us of Indulgences. Who then can grant Indulgences?

*Prov.* – The faculty to dispense holy Indulgences resides in the Supreme Pontiff. Since in every society, in every government, one of the most noble prerogatives of the Head of State is the right to grant pardons and to commute punishments. Now the Supreme Pontiff, representative of Jesus Christ on Earth, Head of the great Christian society, undoubtedly has the right to give grace, to commute, remit in whole or in part the punishment incurred for sin, in favour of those who sincerely return to God.

*Giul.* – On what basis is this power of the Supreme Pontiff founded?

*Prov.* – This power, or authority of the Supreme Pontiff in dispensing Indulgences, is based on the very words of Jesus Christ. In the act of appointing Saint Peter to govern the Church, he said these words: “I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”. This faculty undoubtedly encompasses a right to grant Christians everything that can contribute to the good of their souls.

*Giul.* – These words seem magical to me. They establish Saint Peter as the head of the Church, give him the faculty to remit sins, the faculty to make precepts, to grant Indulgences, and all this in those few words!

*Prov.* – The words spoken by Jesus Christ to Saint Peter confer a full and absolute power, and this full and absolute power constitutes Saint Peter as the Head of the Church, Vicar of Jesus Christ, dispenser of all heavenly



favours, therefore also of holy Indulgences. This is evident since the Lord gave him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven: *Tibi dabo claves regni coelorum*; and from the words with which he commanded Saint Peter to be a shepherd, that is, to dispense to Christians what people and times would require from him for their spiritual and eternal good. These words of the Saviour conclude that the power given to Saint Peter and his successors excludes any doubt about the faculty to grant Indulgences.

*Giul.* – I understand very well that with these words the Saviour gave great powers especially to Saint Peter, among which the faculty to remit sins. However, I cannot understand that the faculty to dispense Indulgences was given.

*Prov.* – If you understand very well that with those words the Saviour gave especially to Saint Peter (as with other similar ones he also gave to the other Apostles) the faculty to remit sins, that is, to forgive eternal punishment, must we then say that the faculty to remit temporal punishment through Indulgences, which in comparison to that can be said to be infinitely lesser, was not given?

*Giul.* – This is true; this is true. Just tell me if those words were understood in this sense by the Apostles.

*Prov.* – This is certain, and I can present you with more facts noted in the Bible. I will limit myself to mentioning just one. This is from Saint Paul, and it concerns the faithful of Corinth. Among those fervent Christians, a young man had committed a grave sin for which he deserved to be excommunicated. He soon showed that he was repentant, expressing a strong desire to fulfil the penance due. Then the Corinthians prayed Saint Paul to absolve him. This Apostle used indulgence, that is, he freed him from excommunication and restored him to the bosom of the Church, although, due to the gravity of the sin, and according to the discipline in force at that time, he should have remained separated from the Church for a long time. From these words and others of the same Saint Paul, it appears that he himself bound and loosed, that is, used rigor and indulgence, depending on how he judged

it would be more beneficial for souls.

*Giul.* – I am very pleased with what you have narrated to me about Indulgences, as is included in Sacred Scripture. I am completely sure and at peace in believing that God has given the Church the faculty to dispense Indulgences. I would also be very pleased if you could tell me whether the dispensing of these has always taken place in the Church, because the Protestants say that in the early times there was no talk of Indulgences.

*Prov.* – Even in this, the Protestants are mistaken, and ecclesiastical history is full of facts that demonstrate the divine institution of Indulgences and their constant use since the early times of the Church. And since I know that you like facts very much, I want to recount some to confirm what I am saying.

*Giul.* – I like facts very much, even more than reasons, and if many are recounted, I will be very pleased.

*Prov.* – After the time of the Apostles, the use of Indulgences continued. In the first century of the Common Era, we have mention of this fact. In the second century, we read that during the persecution, when a sinner returned to the Church, they were first obliged to confess their sins. Then a time was imposed upon them, during which, if they fervently engaged in works of penance, they would obtain Indulgence, that is, their time of penance would be shortened. To obtain this more easily, it was recommended to those who were led to martyrdom to pray to the bishop, or to write him a note, begging him to grant them indulgence in view of the sufferings of the martyrs and thus, grant them peace with God and with the Church (Tertullian, *Ad maj.* 1, I).

In the third century, Saint Cyprian, writing to the faithful detained in prison, warns them not to intercede too easily for Indulgence for those who ask for it, but to wait until they show sufficient signs of sorrow and repentance for their own faults. From these words, it appears that in the times of Saint Cyprian, Indulgences were in use, and that the Saint recommended to the martyrs to be cautious not to

intercede with the Bishops except for those who showed sincere repentance (Ep. 21, 22, 23).

In the fourth century, in the year 325, a general Council was convened in the city of Nicaea, in which many matters concerning the universal good of the Church were discussed. When the time came to speak of Indulgences, it was established that those who do penance could obtain Indulgence from the Bishop and that those most negligent should do their penance within the established time. This means nothing other than granting Indulgence to some and denying it to others (Council of Nicaea, Canon 11, 12).

In later times, the facts are countless. Saint Gregory the Great, in a letter written to the King of the Visigoths, sent a small key that had touched the body of Saint Peter, and contained a bit of filings from the chains with which that holy Apostle had been bound, *so that, says the Pope, what had served to bind the Apostle's neck when he went to martyrdom, may absolve you from all your sins.* This is how the Holy Fathers interpret the sense of plenary Indulgence, which the Pope sent along with that blessed key.

In the year 803, Saint Leo the Great, having travelled with a large assembly of cardinals, archbishops and prelates to the court of the Emperor Charlemagne, was received by the pious sovereign with the utmost honours. That monarch asked for and obtained, as a particular favour, that he dedicate the royal palace of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) to the Blessed Virgin, and that he enrich it with many indulgences to be gained by those who went to visit it. If you want me to recount other facts, I could recite almost the entire ecclesiastical history, especially the history of the Crusades, the circumstances during which the Popes granted plenary Indulgence to those who enlisted to go to Palestine to liberate the Holy Places.

In conclusion and confirmation of what I have said so far, I present here the Doctrine of the Catholic Church regarding Indulgences as defined in the Council of Trent:

“Having been granted by Christ to the Church, the

faculty to dispense Indulgences has been used by the Church since very remote times; therefore, the sacred Council commands and teaches that it should be held that Indulgences are useful for the salvation of Christians, as proven by the authority of the Councils. Whoever says that Indulgences are useless, or denies that there is the faculty to dispense them in the Church, let him be anathema: let him be excommunicated (Sess. 25, chap. 21)".

*Giul.* – Enough, enough, if the faculty to dispense Indulgences was given by God to the Church, was practised by the Apostles and has always been in use in the Church in every century up to our days, we must say plainly that the Protestants are in grave error when they criticise the Catholic Church for dispensing holy Indulgences, as if the use of them had not been practised in the early times of the Church.

## **DIALOGUE VI. Acquisition of Indulgences**

*Prov.* – While we admire God's goodness in dispensing the holy Indulgences, in granting heavenly treasures that do not diminish, nor will they ever, if anything they spread, like an immense ocean that does not become reduced no matter how much water is drawn from it, we must, however, fulfil certain obligations for the acquisition of the same. First of all, it is good to emphasise that it is not within the freedom of each Christian to use these divine treasures at will. One will enjoy them only when, how, and in that greater or lesser quantity, that the holy Church and the Supreme Pontiff determine. Thus, Indulgences are commonly distinguished into two classes: partial, that is, of some days, months, or years, and plenary. For example, by saying: My Jesus, mercy, one earns a hundred days of Indulgence. When one says: Mary, help of Christians, pray for us, one earns 300 days. Every time one accompanies the Viaticum to a sick person, one can earn seven years of Indulgence. These indulgences are partial. The plenary Indulgence is that for which all the punishment, for which we are indebted to God for

our sins, is remitted. This is precisely what the Pope grants on the occasion of this Jubilee. By earning this indulgence, you return to be before God, as you were when you were born, that is, when you were baptised, so that, if one were to die after earning the Jubilee Indulgence, they would go to heaven without touching the pains of purgatory. *Giul.* – I wholeheartedly desire to earn this plenary Indulgence. Just let me know what I must do.

*Prov.* – To earn this, as with any other Indulgence, it is first required that one be in a state of grace with God, because one who is guilty of a grave sin and eternal punishment before God is certainly not, nor can be, capable of receiving the remission of temporal punishment. It is therefore excellent advice that every Christian who wishes to acquire indulgences when and how they are granted should approach the Sacrament of Confession, striving to excite true sorrow within themselves, and make a firm resolution not to offend God any more in the future.

The second condition is the fulfilment of what the Roman Pontiff prescribes. In opening the treasure of holy Indulgences, the holy Church always obliges the faithful to some good work to be done at a determined time and place. This is to prepare our hearts to receive those extraordinary favours that God's mercy has prepared for us. Thus, to acquire the Indulgence of this Jubilee, the supreme Pontiff wants everyone to approach the Sacraments of Confession and Communion, to devoutly visit four churches for 15 consecutive times or alternately, praying according to their intention, for the exaltation and prosperity of our holy mother Church, for the eradication of heresy, for the peace and concord of Christian principles, for the peace and unity of all Christian people.

*Giul.* – Are these things enough to earn the Jubilee Indulgence?

*Prov.* – These two things are not enough, there is still one more, which is the main one. It is required that all sins, even venial ones, be detested, and moreover, that one

renounce affection for all and each of them. And we will certainly do this if we prepare ourselves to practise those things that the confessor will impose on us, but above all if we make a firm and effective resolution never to commit any sin again, if we avoid the occasions and practise the means to not fall back. The Supreme Pontiff Clement VI, to encourage Christians all over the world to acquire the Jubilee, said: "Jesus Christ, with His grace and the overflowing merits of His passion, left to the Church militant here on earth an infinite treasure not hidden within a sheet, nor buried in a field, rather entrusted to be healthily dispensed to the faithful, entrusted to blessed Peter, who holds the keys of Heaven, and to his successors, Vicars of Jesus Christ on earth; to which treasure the merits of the blessed Mother of God and of all the elect contribute".

Now, my dear Giuliano, you have learned what is necessary to acquire this plenary Indulgence, and since among other things it is prescribed to make a visit to four churches, I will now provide you with the necessary devotional practises that may serve you in each of these visits (Those who wish to learn more about the holy indulgences may consult MORONI article: *Indulgences. Magnum Theatrum vitae humanae. Artic. Indulgentia.* – BERGIER *Indulgences.* – FERRARI in *Biblioteca* [Library]).

*For greater convenience, the intentions of the Church in promulgating this Jubilee, the favours granted during it, and the conditions for acquiring the Plenary Indulgence are summarised here.*

## **INTENTIONS OF THE CHURCH IN PROMULGATING THE JUBILEE**

The intentions of the Church in inviting us to participate in the Jubilee are: 1) to renew the memory of our Redemption and to excite us to a dynamic gratitude towards the Divine Saviour; 2) to revive in us the sentiments of faith, religion, and piety; 3) to prepare ourselves through the most abundant lights that the Lord grants in this time of

salvation, against errors, impiety, corruption, and scandals that surround us from all sides; 4) to awaken and increase the spirit of prayer, which is the weapon of the Christian; 5) to excite us to heartfelt penance, to amend our ways, and to redeem with good works the sins that have drawn down God's wrath upon us; 6) to obtain through this conversion of sinners and the greater perfection of the just, that God may hasten in His mercy the triumph of the Church amidst the cruel war waged against her by her enemies. To these intentions, we must also associate ourselves in our prayers.

### **SPECIAL FAVOURS GRANTED DURING THE JUBILEE**

To encourage sinners to participate in the Jubilee, this holy year every confessor is given the faculty to absolve from any sin, even those reserved to the Bishop or the Pope, as well as to commute into other works of piety the vows of almost every kind, which one may have made and cannot observe.

Moreover, everyone, fulfilling the conditions indicated below, can in this circumstance acquire not only the remission of all their sins but also the *Plenary Indulgence*, that is, the remission of all the temporal punishment that would still remain to be expiated in this world or in purgatory.

Such indulgence is applicable to the souls in Purgatory, but it can be acquired only once during the Jubilee.

The time of the Jubilee began on January 1st and ends on December 31st, 1875.

### **CONDITIONS FOR ACQUIRING THE JUBILEE INDULGENCE**

1<sup>st</sup> ***Going to confession with the proper dispositions***, earning absolution with true repentance.

2<sup>nd</sup> ***Approaching Communion worthily***: those who have not yet been admitted may have it commuted through a pious work by the confessor. A single Communion is not enough to

satisfy both the Easter precept and to acquire the Jubilee at the same time.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Visiting four Churches for fifteen consecutive days or intermittently** with the intention of attaining the Jubilee. It is sufficient to make this intention once at the beginning. The visit must be made to all four Churches (For Turin, the Churches of St. John, the Consolata, the Holy Martyrs, and St. Philip are designated. In other places, each should consult their own parish priest or director) on the same day. However, the time from the first Vespers of one day until the end of the following day can be counted as one day. Thus, for example, from noon today to the end of tomorrow can be counted as one day. It would not be sufficient to visit one Church per day. However, in case of serious impediment, confessors have the faculty to modify the visits or even commute them into other pious works. The visits can be made before or after Confession and Communion, or even in between. It is not necessary, but it is highly desirable that they be made in a state of grace, that is, without mortal sin on one's conscience.

No special prayers are prescribed when making these visits, and it may suffice for one to remain for about a quarter of an hour in each Church reciting the *Acts of Faith, Hope*, etc., with five *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys*, and *Glorias*, praying according to the intention of the Church and the Pope.

For the convenience of the devout, some considerations are provided here that may serve as reading material during these visits.

### **VISIT TO THE FIRST CHURCH. Confession**

A great aspect of God's mercy towards sinners is found in the Sacrament of Confession. If God had said to forgive our sins only through Baptism, and not those that, unfortunately, would be committed after receiving this Sacrament, oh! how many Christians would go to eternal perdition! But God, knowing our misery, established another



Sacrament, through which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven. This is the Sacrament of Confession. Here is what the Gospel says: Eight days after His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and said to them: Peace be with you. As the heavenly Father sent me, so I send you, that is, the authority given to me by the Heavenly Father to do what is good for the salvation of souls, I give to you. Then the Saviour, breathing on them, said: Receive the Holy Spirit; those whose sins you forgive are forgiven; those whose sins you retain are retained. Everyone understands that the words retain or not retain mean *to give* or *not give absolution*. This is the great authority given by God to His Apostles and their successors in the administration of the Holy Sacraments.

From these words of the Saviour arises an obligation for the sacred Ministers to listen to confessions, and equally the obligation for Christians to confess their sins arises, so that it is known when to give or not give absolution, what advice to suggest to remedy the evil done, in short, to give all those paternal warnings that are necessary to repair the evils of the past life and not to commit them again in the future.

Confession too was not something practised only at some time and in some place. As soon as the Apostles began to preach the Gospel, the Sacrament of Penance began to be practised. We read that when St. Paul preached in Ephesus, many faithful, who had already embraced the faith came to the feet of the Apostles and confessed their sins. *Confitentes et annunciantes actus suos*. [Confessing and announcing their deeds]. From the time of the Apostles until now, the practise of this venerable Sacrament has always been observed. Throughout the ages the Catholic Church has condemned as heretical anyone who dared to deny this truth. Nor is there anyone who has been able to do without it. Rich and poor, servants and masters, kings, monarchs, emperors, priests, bishops, the same Supreme Pontiffs, all must kneel at the feet of a sacred minister to obtain forgiveness for those sins they may have committed after Baptism. But alas! How many

Christians take poor advantage of this Sacrament! Some approach it without preparing themselves, others confess indifferently, without sorrow or resolution; others tend to leave out important things in confession, or do not fulfil the obligations imposed by the confessor. These people take the most holy and useful thing to use it for their own ruin. St. Teresa had a tremendous revelation on this matter. She saw that souls were falling into hell like snow falls in winter on the slopes of the mountains. Frightened by that vision, she asked Jesus Christ for an explanation, and received in response that they were going to perdition because of poorly made confessions in their lives.

To encourage us to go to confess with complete sincerity, let us consider that the priest, who awaits us in the tribunal of Penance, awaits us in the name of God and in the name of God he forgives the sins of men. If there were a condemned criminal sentenced to death for a serious crime, and at the moment of being led to the gallows, the minister of the king presented himself saying: Your guilt is forgiven; the king grants you mercy for your life, and welcomes you among his friends, and so that you do not doubt what I say, here is the decree that authorises me to revoke your death sentence, what feelings of gratitude and love this guilty person would express towards the king and his minister! This is exactly what happens to us. We are the true guilty ones who, by sinning, have deserved the eternal punishment of hell. The minister of the King of kings, in the name of God in the tribunal of Penance, tells us: God sends me to you to absolve you from your sins, to close hell to you, to open Paradise for you, to restore you to friendship with God. And so that you not doubt the authority given to me, here is a decree signed by the same Jesus Christ, which authorises me to recall from you the death sentence. The decree is expressed as follows: Those whose sins you forgive are forgiven; those whose sins you retain are retained. *Quorum remisistis peccata, remittuntur eis, quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.* With what esteem and reverence must we approach a minister who, in the

name of God, can do us so much good and prevent us from so much evil!

There must be a special reason that encourages us to tell every sin to the confessor, and that is that on the occasion of Jubilee he has the authority to absolve from any sin, even reserved ones. Anyone who has incurred censures, excommunications, and other ecclesiastical penalties can be absolved by any confessor without resorting to the Bishop or the Pope.

Nor should the fear that the confessor will reveal to others the things heard in confession keep us away from confession. No, this has never been the case in the past, nor will it ever be so in the future. A good father undoubtedly keeps the confidences of his children secret. The confessor is a true spiritual father; therefore, even speaking humanly, he keeps under strict secrecy what we reveal to him. But there is more. An absolute, natural, ecclesiastical, and divine precept binds the confessor to silence about anything heard in confession. Even if it were to prevent a serious evil, to free himself and the whole world from death, he cannot use information obtained in confession, unless the penitent expressly gives him the authority to speak about it. Therefore, go, oh Christian, go often to this friend. The more often you go to him, the more you will ensure that you walk the path to Heaven. The more often you go to Him, the more you will be assured of the forgiveness of your sins, and you will be assured of that eternal happiness promised by the same Jesus Christ, who gave such great power to His ministers. Do not let the multitude or the seriousness of your sins hold you back. The priest is a minister of God's mercy, which is infinite. Therefore, He can absolve any number of sins, no matter how serious they are. Let us only present a humbled and contrite heart, and then we will certainly have forgiveness. *Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies:*

#### PRAYER

O my Jesus, who died on the cross for me, I thank you with all

my heart that you did not let me die in sin. From this moment I turn to you. I promise to leave sin and to faithfully observe your commandments for all the time you allow me to live. I am sorry for having offended you. In the future, I want to love and serve you until death. Holy Virgin, my Mother, help me in that last moment of life. Jesus, Joseph, Mary, may my soul rest in peace with you! – Three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys*, and *Glorias*.

## **VISIT TO THE SECOND CHURCH. Holy Communion**

Do you understand, oh Christian, what it means to receive Holy Communion? It means approaching the table of angels to receive the body, blood, soul, and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is given as food to our soul under the appearances of consecrated bread and wine. At Mass, during the moment the priest pronounces the words of consecration over the bread and wine, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The words used by our Divine Saviour in instituting this Sacrament are: This is my Body, this is my Blood: *Hoc est corpus meum, hic est calix sanguinis mei*.

These words are used by priests in the name of Jesus Christ in the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. Therefore, when we go to receive Communion, we receive the same Jesus Christ in body, blood, soul, and divinity, that is, true God and true man, alive as He is in Heaven. It is not His image, nor His figure, as is a statue, a crucifix, but it is Jesus Christ Himself as He was born of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and died for us on the Cross. Jesus Christ Himself assured us of this real presence in the Holy Eucharist when He said: This is my Body, which will be given for the salvation of men: *Corpus quod pro vobis tradetur*. This is the living bread that came down from Heaven: *Hic est panis vivus qui de coelo descendit*. The bread that I will give is my flesh. The drink that I will give is my true blood. Whoever does not eat of this body and does not drink of this blood has no life in him/her.

Having instituted this Sacrament for the good of

our souls, Jesus desires that we approach it often. Here are the words with which He invites us: "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest: *Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.* Elsewhere He said to the Hebrews: Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and died, but whoever eats the food represented by the manna, that food which I give, that food which is my Body and my Blood, he/she will not die. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him; for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink". Who could resist these loving invitations from the divine Saviour? To respond to these invitations, the Christians of the early days went every day to listen to the Word of God and every day they approached Holy Communion. It is in this sacrament that the martyrs found their strength, the virgins their fervour, the saints their courage.

And we, how often do we approach this heavenly food? If we examine the desires of Jesus Christ and our needs, we must receive Communion very often. Just as the manna served as daily food for the Hebrews throughout the time they lived in the desert until they were led into the Promised Land, so Holy Communion should be our comfort, our daily food in the dangers of this world to guide us to the true promised land of Paradise. St. Augustine says: If every day we ask God for bodily bread, why do we not also strive to nourish ourselves every day with spiritual bread through Holy Communion? St. Philip Neri encouraged Christians to confess every eight days and to communicate even more often according to the advice of the confessor. Finally, the holy Church expresses the living desire for frequent Communion in the Council of Trent, where it says: "It would be highly desirable for every faithful Christian to maintain such a state of conscience that he/she could receive Holy Communion not only spiritually but sacramentally every time he/she attends holy Mass".

Some people would say: I am too sinful. If you are a sinner, try to put yourself in grace with the Sacrament of Confession, and then approach Holy Communion, and you will

receive great help. Another would say: I take communion rarely to have greater fervour. And this is a deception. Things that are done rarely are mostly done poorly. On the other hand, since your needs are frequent, the help for your soul must be frequent. Some add: I am full of spiritual infirmities and do not dare to take communion often. Jesus Christ replies: Those who are well do not need a doctor. Therefore, those who are most subject to discomfort need to be visited often by the doctor. Courage then, oh Christian, if you want to perform the most glorious action for God, the most pleasing to all the saints in Heaven, the most effective for overcoming temptations, the most secure for making you persevere in good, it is certainly Holy Communion.

#### *PRAYER*

Why, oh my Jesus, does your Church, my mother, want me to rejoice this year? Is there perhaps a reason for joy more than at other times? Ah! Your being here on earth, being able to unite with You in Holy Communion, is it not a reason above all others to make us rejoice continuously? For me, I see nothing else that brings joy to my heart outside of You, true Spouse of the triumphant Church, only consoler and fortifier of the militant Church. But how then was it established to designate a year in particular for rejoicing? Ah, too sadly, oh my Jesus, we do not make enough fuss of this great good of Communion that we should! Too sadly, we easily forget this incomprehensible treasure, for which your spouse, our dearest Mother, is forced from time to time to awaken our attention to bring us back to you. Here, here is why she wants me to rejoice. She does not want me to rejoice only this year, but through this means she wants to call me back to You, whom I should never have lost and from whom I should never have distanced myself. Oh! Bind me to You in Holy Communion with such a bond that it may never be dissolved for all eternity. Three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys* and *Glorias*.

#### **VISIT TO THE THIRD CHURCH. Almsgiving**

A very effective means, yet greatly neglected by people to gain paradise, is almsgiving. By almsgiving, I mean any act of mercy exercised towards one's neighbour for the love of God. God says in the Holy Scripture that almsgiving obtains the forgiveness of sins, even if they are in great multitude: *Charitas operit multitudinem peccatorum*. The divine Saviour says in the Gospel: *"Quod superest date pauperibus"*. What exceeds your needs, give to the poor. Whoever has two coats should give one to the needy, and whoever has more than necessary should share with those who are hungry (Lk 3). God assures us that whatever we do for the poor, He considers it as done to Himself: "All that you do to one of my least brothers, you have done to me" (Mt 25). Do you then desire that God forgive your sins and free you from eternal death? Give alms. *"Eleemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat"*. Do you want to prevent your soul from going to the darkness of hell? Give alms. *"Eleemosyna non partietur animam ire ad tenebras"* (Tb 4). Thus, God assures us that almsgiving is a very effective means to obtain the forgiveness of our sins, to find mercy in His eyes, and to lead us to eternal life. *"Eleemosyna est quae purgat a peccato, facit invenire misericordiam et vitam aeternam"*.

If you desire that God show mercy to you, begin to show it to the poor. You would say: I do what I can. But be careful that the Lord tells you to give to the poor all that is superfluous: *"Quod superest date pauperibus"*. Therefore, I say to you that those purchases and increases in riches that you make year after year are superfluous. It is superfluous that exquisiteness you seek for tableware, meals, carpets, and clothing that could serve those who are hungry, those who are thirsty, and to cover the naked. Superfluous is that luxury in travels, theatres, dances, and other entertainments where it can be said that the wealth of the poor is being squandered.

It seems appropriate to note here the interpretation that some give to the precept of the superfluous, certainly not according to the words of Jesus Christ: It is a counsel, they say, therefore, having given a

part of the superfluous in almsgiving, we can spend the rest as we please. I respond that the Saviour did not designate any percentage. His words are positive, clear, and without distinction: "*Quod superest date pauperibus*". Give the superfluous to the poor. This was done so that everyone would be persuaded that the severity of His command was motivated by the abuse that many make of it and for which they run a serious risk of being eternally lost. He wanted to add these other words: "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved", thus condemning the vain pretexts with which those who possess temporal goods try to excuse themselves from giving the superfluous to the poor.

Some then truthfully say: I have no riches. If you have no riches, give what you can. Moreover, you do not lack means and ways to give alms. Are there not the sick to visit, to assist, to watch over? Are there not abandoned youth to welcome, instruct, shelter in your home, if you can, or at least take them where they can learn the science of salvation? Are there not sinners to admonish, the doubtful to counsel, the afflicted to console, quarrels to calm, injuries to forgive? See how many means you have to give alms and earn eternal life! Moreover, can you not say some prayers, make some confessions, receive communion, recite a rosary, listen to a Mass in suffrage for the souls in purgatory, for the conversion of sinners, or that the infidels may be enlightened and come to the faith? Is it not also a great almsgiving to burn perverse books, spread good books, and speak as much as you can in honour of our holy Catholic Religion?

Another reason that should urge you to give alms is what the Saviour mentions in the Holy Gospel. He says: "You will not give the poor a glass of fresh water without the heavenly Father giving you the reward". Of all that you give to the poor, you will receive a hundredfold in this life and a reward in eternal life. Thus, giving something to the poor in this present life is a multiplication. In other words, it means giving a hundred to one loan even in this present life,



with a full reward that God reserves for us in the other life.

Here is the reason why we see so many families giving abundant alms from all over and continually growing in wealth and prosperity. The reason is given by God: give to the poor, and it will be given to you: "*date, et dabitur vobis*". You will be given a hundredfold in this life, and eternal life in the other: "*centuplum accipiet in hac vita et vitam aeternam possidebit*".

#### PRAYER

Oh my Jesus, I am fully convinced of the necessity I have to give alms, but how will I do it, when I have such a scarcity of true goods, that is, spiritual ones, that I can barely live? How will I pray for the infidels and for the heretics if I barely believe in the truths taught by your holy Church? How will I pray for sinners if I myself love sin? How will I pray for Your Church, for Your Vicar, if I hardly notice that they are persecuted, so blinded am I by worldly occupations? Ah, Lord! By your sacred Heart, I implore you to grant me a little almsgiving, to give me a bit of that charity that animated your original disciples, of that charity that burned in the hearts of Saint John the Almsgiver, Francis Xavier, Vincent de Paul. Then indeed all that I have will be for all my brothers, and, as far as it depends on me, I will truly celebrate the Year of Jubilee, sharing with those who are without the goods received from You, so that I may rejoice and celebrate with them in your riches. Three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys* and *Glorias*.

#### VISIT TO THE FOURTH CHURCH. Thoughts of salvation

In the eyes of faith, the thought of salvation is most essential, but in the face of the world, it is the most neglected. Therefore, while you are in this Church, oh Christian, direct your gaze upon a Crucifix, and listen to what Jesus tells you. He loosens His tongue and speaks to you thus: one thing alone, oh man, is necessary: to save your soul: "*unum est necessarium*". If you acquire honours, glory,

riches, knowledge, and then do not save your soul, all is lost for you. *"Quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur?"* (Mt 16:26).

This thought has determined many young people to leave the world, many rich to distribute their wealth to the poor, many missionaries to abandon their homeland, to go to faraway lands, many martyrs to give their lives for the faith. All these thought that if they lost their souls, nothing would benefit them from all the goods of the world for eternal life. For this reason, St. Paul urged Christians to think seriously about the issue of salvation: "We urge you," he writes, "Oh brothers, to pay attention to the great affairs of salvation" (1 Thess 10,4).

But of what affairs is St. Paul speaking here? He spoke, says St. Jerome, of the affairs that include everything, affairs that if unsuccessful, the eternal kingdom of Paradise is lost, and nothing remains but to be thrown into a pit of torments that will have no end.

Therefore, St. Philip Neri was right to call all those, who in this life attend to procuring honours and lucrative positions, riches, and pay little attention to saving their souls, fools. Every loss of property, reputation, relatives, health, even life, can be repaired in this world. But with what good of the world, with what fortune can one repair the loss of the soul? Listen, Oh Christian, it is Jesus Christ who calls you: listen to His voice. He wants to grant you mercy or forgiveness for your sins, and the remission of the penalty due for those same sins. However, keep firmly in mind that he who today does not think of saving himself runs a serious risk of being tomorrow with the damned in hell and being lost for all eternity.

But consider that at this moment, while you are in church thinking about your soul, many are dying and perhaps going to hell. How many from the beginning of the world until our days have died of every age and condition and have gone eternally lost! It may be that they had the will to be damned? I do not believe that any of them had this intention. The

deception was in deferring their conversion. They died in sin, and now they are damned. Keep this maxim well in mind: a man in this world does much if he saves himself, and knows much if he has the knowledge of salvation. But he does nothing if he loses his soul, and knows nothing if he ignores those things that can eternally save him.

#### *PRAYER*

Oh my Redeemer, you have shed your blood to obtain my soul, and I have lost it so many times through sin! I thank you for giving me time to put myself in your grace. Oh my God, I am sorry for having offended you. I wish I had died before and never displeased a God as good as you are. Yes, my God, I offer you all of myself, I hide my iniquities in your most sacred wounds, and I know with certainty, oh my God, that you do not despise a heart that humbles and repents. Oh Mary, refuge of sinners, help a sinner who commends himself to you and trusts in you. – Three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys* and *Glorias*, with the exclamation: Jesus my, mercy.

*With the permission of the ecclesiastical authority.*

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## **Life of Saint Paul the Apostle, Doctor of the Gentiles**

*The culminating moment of the Jubilee Year for every believer is the passage through the Holy Door, a highly symbolic gesture that should be experienced with deep meditation. It is not a simple visit to admire the architectural, sculptural, or pictorial beauty of a basilica: the early Christians did not go to places of worship for this reason, also because at that*

*time there was not much to admire. They came instead to pray before the relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, and to obtain indulgence through their powerful intercession.*

*Visiting the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul without knowing their lives is not a sign of appreciation. For this reason, in this Jubilee Year, we wish to present the faith journeys of these two glorious apostles, as narrated by Saint John Bosco.*

**Life of Saint Paul the Apostle, Doctor of the Gentiles as told to the people by Father John Bosco**

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## **PREFACE**

Saint Peter is the prince of the Apostles, the first Pope, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. He was established as the head of the Church; but his mission was particularly directed towards the conversion of the Jews. Saint Paul, on the other hand, is the Apostle who was called by God in an extraordinary way to bring the Light of the Gospel to the Gentiles. These two great Saints are named by the Church as the columns and foundations of the Faith, princes of the Apostles, who by their labours, their writings, and their blood taught us the law of the Lord; *Ipsi nos docuerunt legem tuam, Domine*. This is why the life of Saint Peter is followed by the life of Saint Paul.

It is true that this apostle is not to be counted among the series of Popes; but the extraordinary labours he undertook to help Saint Peter propagate the Gospel, his zeal, charity, and the doctrine left to us in the sacred books make him worthy to be placed alongside the life of the first Pope, as a powerful pillar upon which the Church of Jesus Christ rests.

## **CHAPTER I. Birthplace, Saint Paul's**

## **education, his hatred for Christians**

Saint Paul was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Eight days after his birth he was circumcised, and was given the name Saul, which was later changed to Paul. His father lived in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a province of Asia Minor. Emperor Caesar Augustus granted many favours to this city, including the right of Roman citizenship. Therefore, Saint Paul, being born in Tarsus, was a Roman citizen, a status that brought with it many advantages, as one could enjoy immunity from the specific laws of all countries subject to or allied with the Roman Empire, and in any place a Roman citizen could appeal to the Senate or the Emperor for judgment.

His relatives, being well-off, sent him to Jerusalem to give him an education suitable to their status. His teacher was a doctor named Gamaliel, a man of great virtue, whom we have already mentioned in the life of Saint Peter. In that city he had the fortune to find a good companion from Cyprus, named Barnabas, a young man of great virtue, whose kindness of heart greatly helped to temper the fiery spirit of his fellow student. These two young men remained loyal friends, and we will see them become colleagues in the preaching of the Gospel.

Saul's father was a Pharisee, meaning he professed the strictest sect among the Jews, which consisted of a great outward appearance of rigour, a principle entirely contrary to the spirit of humility of the Gospel. Saul followed his father's teachings, and since his teacher was also a Pharisee he became full of enthusiasm to increase their number and remove any obstacle that opposed such a goal.

It was customary among the Jews to have their children learn a trade while attending to the study of the Bible. They did this in order to preserve them from the dangers that idleness brings; and also to occupy the body and spirit in something that could provide for their livelihood in the harsh circumstances of life. Saul learned the trade of a leather worker and especially to sew tents. He stood out among



all those of his age for his zeal towards the law of Moses and the traditions of the Jews. This poorly enlightened zeal made him a blasphemer, persecutor, and fierce enemy of Jesus Christ.

He incited the Jews to condemn Saint Stephen, and he was present at his death. And since his age did not allow him to take part in the execution of the sentence, when Stephen was to be stoned he kept watch over the others' clothes and furiously urged them on to throw stones at him. But Stephen, a true follower of the Saviour, took the revenge that is the saints', that is, he began to pray for those who were stoning him. This prayer was the beginning of Saul's conversion; and Saint Augustine says precisely that the Church would not have had an apostle in Paul if deacon Stephen had not prayed.

At that time, a violent persecution was raised against the Jerusalem Church, and Saul was the one who showed a fierce eagerness to disperse the disciples of Jesus Christ and put them to death. In order to better foment the persecution publicly and privately, he had himself authorised by the high priest. Then he became like a hungry wolf that is not satisfied with tearing and devouring. He entered the houses of Christians, insulted them, beat them, bound them, or had them loaded with chains to be dragged off to prison. He had them beaten with rods; in short, he used every means to force them to blaspheme the holy name of Jesus Christ. The news of Saul's violence spread even to distant lands, so that his very name instilled fear among the faithful.

The persecutors were not content to be cruel against the Christians in person, but, as was always the case with persecutors, they also stripped them of their goods and of what they possessed in common. This led many to live on the alms that the faithful from distant Churches sent them. But there is a God who assists and governs his Church, and when we least expect it he comes to the aid of those who trust in him.

## CHAPTER II. Conversion and Baptism of Saul – Year of Christ 34

Saul's fury could not be satisfied; he breathed nothing but threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Having heard that in Damascus, a city about fifty miles from Jerusalem, many Jews had embraced the faith, he felt a burning desire to go there for a massacre. To freely do what his hatred against Christians suggested, he went to the high priest and the Senate, who authorized him with letters to go to Damascus, place all the Jews who declared themselves Christians in chains, and then bring them to Jerusalem to punish them with a severity capable of deterring those who might be tempted to imitate them.

But the plans of men are in vain when they are contrary to those of Heaven! God, moved by the prayers of Saint Stephen and the other persecuted faithful, wanted to manifest his power and mercy in Saul. Saul, with his commendatory letters, full of zeal, plunging along the road, was near the city of Damascus, and it already seemed to him that he had the Christians in his hands. But that was the place of divine mercy.

In the heat of his blind fury, around noon, a great light, brighter than the sun, surrounded him and all those who accompanied him. Astonished by that heavenly brightness, they all fell to the ground as if dead; at the same time, they heard the sound of a voice, understood only by Saul. "Saul, Saul," said the voice, "why are you persecuting me?" Then Saul, even more frightened, replied: "Who are you, Lord?" The voice continued, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Remember that it is too hard to kick against the goad, which you do by resisting one more powerful than you. By persecuting my Church you persecute me; but it will become more flourishing, and you will do harm only to yourself."

This sweet reproach from the Saviour, accompanied by the inner anointing of his grace, softened the hardness of

Saul's heart and changed him into a completely new man. Therefore, all humbled, he exclaimed: "Lord, what do you want me to do?" As if to say: What is the means to procure your glory? I offer myself to you to do your most holy will.

Jesus Christ ordered Saul to rise and go into the city where a disciple would instruct him about what he should do. God, says Saint Augustine, by entrusting to his ministers the instruction of an apostle called in such an extraordinary manner, teaches us that we must seek his holy will in the teaching of the Pastors whom he has clothed with his authority to be our spiritual guides on earth.

Saul, once he had risen, could see nothing any more, even though he kept his eyes open. Therefore, it was necessary to give him a hand and lead him to Damascus, as if Jesus Christ wanted to lead him in triumph. He took lodging in the house of a merchant named Judas; he stayed there for three days without seeing, without drinking, and without eating, still unaware of what God wanted from him.

There was a disciple named Ananias in Damascus, highly esteemed by the Jews for his virtue and holiness. Jesus Christ appeared to him and said: "Ananias!" And he replied: "Here I am, Lord." The Lord added: "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and seek a certain Saul, a native of Tarsus; you will find him praying." Ananias, having heard the name of Saul, trembled and said: "O Lord, where are you sending me? You know well the great evil he has done to the faithful in Jerusalem; now it is known to all that he has come here with full power to bind all those who believe in your Name." The Lord replied: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." While Jesus Christ was speaking to Ananias he sent Saul another vision, in which a man named Ananias appeared to him who came to him, and laying hands on him restored his sight. The Lord did this to assure Saul that Ananias was the one he was sending to manifest his will to him.

Ananias obeyed, went to find Saul, laid hands on him, and said: "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road as you were coming to Damascus has sent me to you so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Speaking thus, Ananias, holding his hands on Saul's head, added: "Open your eyes." At that moment, scales fell from Saul's eyes like fish scales, and he regained his sight perfectly.

Then Ananias added: "Now arise and receive Baptism, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Saul immediately rose to receive Baptism; then, full of joy, he refreshed his weariness with a bit of food. After spending just a few days with the disciples in Damascus, he began to preach the Gospel in the synagogues, demonstrating with the Sacred Scriptures that Jesus was the Son of God. All who heard him were filled with astonishment, and they kept saying: "Is this not the one who in Jerusalem persecuted those who called on the name of Jesus and has come here specifically to take them as prisoners?"

But Saul had already surpassed all human respect; he desired nothing more than to promote the glory of God and repair the scandal given; therefore, allowing everyone to say what they wanted about him, he confused the Jews and boldly preached Jesus Crucified.

## **CHAPTER III. Saul's first journey – He returns to Damascus; traps are set for him – He goes to Jerusalem; he presents himself to the Apostles – Jesus Christ appears to him – Year of Jesus Christ 35-36-37**

Saul, seeing the serious opposition he faced from the Jews, deemed it wise to leave Damascus to spend some time with the simple people in the countryside and also to go to

Arabia to seek other peoples more inclined to receive the faith.

After three years, believing the storm had passed, he returned to Damascus, where with zeal and strength he began to preach Jesus Christ; but the Jews, unable to resist the words of God that were preached to them through his minister, decided to have him killed. To better succeed in their intent, they reported him to Aretas, the king of Damascus, portraying Saul as a disturber of the public peace. That king, who was too credulous, listened to the slander and ordered that Saul be taken to prison, and to prevent his escape he placed guards at all the city gates. However, news of these could not be prevented from reaching the disciples and Saul himself. But how could they free him? Those good disciples led him to a house that overlooked the city walls and, placing him in a basket, lowered him down from the wall. Thus, while the guards watched at all the gates and a rigorous search was made in every corner of Damascus, Saul, freed from their hands, took the road to Jerusalem safe and sound.

Although Judea was not the field entrusted to his zeal, the reason for this journey was a holy one. He considered it his essential duty to present himself to Peter, who did not yet know him, and thus account for his mission to the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Saul had instilled such great terror of his name among the faithful in Jerusalem that they could not believe in his conversion. He tried to approach one or the other but they were all fearful and fled from him without giving him time to explain himself. It was at that moment that Barnabas proved to be a true friend. As soon as he heard about the miraculous conversion of this fellow disciple, he immediately went to him to console him; then he went to the Apostles, telling them about the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ to Saul and how, instructed directly by the Lord, he desired nothing more than to proclaim the holy name of God to all the peoples of the earth. At such joyful news the disciples welcomed him with joy, and Saint Peter kept him in his house for several days, where he did not fail to make him

known to the most zealous of the faithful; nor did Saul let any opportunity slip by to bear witness to Jesus Christ in those very places where he had blasphemed and caused others to blaspheme.

And since he was fervently confronting the Jews and confusing them in public and in private, they rose up against him, resolved to take his life. Therefore, the faithful advised him to leave the city. The same thing was made known to him by God through a vision. One day, while Saul was praying in the temple, Jesus Christ appeared to him and said: "Leave immediately from Jerusalem, for this people will not believe what you are about to say about me." Paul replied: "Lord, they know how I was a persecutor of your holy name; if they know that I have converted, surely they will follow my example and convert as well." Jesus added: "Not so: they will not believe your words. Go, I have chosen you to bring my Gospel to distant lands among the Gentiles" (*Acts of the Apostles, chap. 22*).

Thus, with Paul's departure decided, the disciples accompanied him to Caesarea and from there sent him to Tarsus, his homeland, hoping that he would be able to live with less danger among relatives and friends and also begin in that city to make known the name of the Lord.

## **CHAPTER IV. Prophecies of Agabus – Saul and Barnabas ordained bishops – They go to the island of Cyprus – Conversion of the proconsul Sergius – Punishment of the magician Elymas – John Mark returns to Jerusalem – Year of Jesus Christ 40-43**

While Saul was preaching the divine word in Tarsus, Barnabas began to preach it with great fruit in Antioch. Then, seeing the large number of those who came to faith every day, Barnabas deemed it wise to go to Tarsus to

invite Saul to come and assist him. They both came to Antioch, and here with preaching and miracles they gained a large number of believers.

In those days, some prophets, that is, some fervent Christians who were enlightened by God and predicted the future, came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, inspired by the Holy Spirit, predicted a great famine that would desolate the whole earth, as indeed happened under the reign of Claudius. The faithful, to prevent the evils that this famine would cause, resolved to take up a collection and thus each, according to their means, could send some aid to the brothers in Judea. They did this with excellent results. To have someone respected by everyone, they chose Saul and Barnabas and sent them to bring these alms to the priests in Jerusalem so that they could distribute it according to need. Having completed their mission, Saul and Barnabas returned to Antioch.

Other prophets and teachers were also in this city, among whom was a certain Simon nicknamed the Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod. One day, while they were offering the Holy Mysteries and fasting, the Holy Spirit appeared in an extraordinary manner and said to them: "Set Saul and Barnabas apart for me for the work of the sacred ministry to which I have called them." Then a fast was ordained with public prayers, and having laid hands on them they consecrated them as bishops. This ordination was a model for those that the Catholic Church usually performs for its ministers: from here originated the fasts of the four seasons, the prayers and other ceremonies that usually take place during a sacred ordination.

Saul was in Antioch when he had a wonderful vision in which he was caught up to the third heaven, that is, he was lifted up by God to contemplate the most sublime things of Heaven that a mortal man can grasp. He himself left it written that he had seen things that cannot be expressed in words, things never seen, never heard, and that the heart of man cannot even imagine. Comforted by this celestial vision, Saul

departed with Barnabas and went directly to Seleucia in Syria, so named to distinguish it from another city of the same name located near the Tigris towards Persia. They also had with them a certain John Mark, not Mark the Evangelist. He was the son of the pious widow in whose house Saint Peter had taken refuge when he was miraculously freed from prison by an angel. He was Barnabas's cousin and had been brought from Jerusalem to Antioch on the occasion when they went there to bring alms.

Seleucia had a port on the Mediterranean: from there our gospel workers embarked to go to the island of Cyprus, the homeland of Saint Barnabas. Arriving at Salamis, a significant city and port on that island, they began to announce the Gospel to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, who were simpler and more inclined to receive the faith. The two Apostles, preaching throughout that island, came to Paphos, the capital of the country, where the proconsul, that is, the Roman governor named Sergius Paul, resided. Here Saul's zeal had the opportunity to exercise itself due to a magician named Bar-Jesus or Elymas. This man, whether to gain the favour of the proconsul or to extract money from his conjuring, seduced the people and turned Sergius away from following the pious sentiments of his heart. The proconsul, having heard about the preachers who had come to the land he governed, sent for them to come and make known their doctrine. Saul and Barnabas immediately went to explain the truths of the Gospel to him; but Elymas, seeing his means of gain taken away, fearing perhaps worse, began to obstruct God's plans, contradicting Saul's doctrine and discrediting him before the proconsul to keep him away from the truth. Then Saul, all aflame with zeal and the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him: "Wicked man," he said to him, "you vessel of iniquity and fraud, son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease from perverting the straight ways of the Lord? Now behold, the hand of God is upon you: from this moment you will be blind and for as long as God wills, you will not see the light of the sun." Instantly a mist fell upon his eyes, and having lost the ability to see, he went about groping, seeking someone to lead



him by the hand.

At that terrible event, Sergius recognised the hand of God and moved by Saul's preaching and that miracle, believed in Jesus Christ and embraced the faith with all his family. Even the magician Elymas, terrified by this sudden blindness, recognised the divine power in Paul's words and, renouncing magic, converted, did penance, and embraced the faith. On this occasion Saul took the name of Paul, both in memory of the governor's conversion and to be better received among the Gentiles, since Saul was a Hebrew name, while Paul was a Roman name.

Gathered in Paphos, no small result of their preaching, Paul and Barnabas with other companions embarked for Perga, a city in Pamphylia. There they sent John Mark who until then had been helping them, back home. Barnabas would have gladly kept him; but Paul, seeing a certain timidity and inconsistency in him, thought to send him back to his mother in Jerusalem. We will soon see this disciple repair the weakness just shown and become a fervent preacher.

## **CHAPTER V. Saint Paul preaches in Pisidian Antioch – Year of Jesus Christ**

### **44**

From Perga, Saint Paul went with Saint Barnabas to Antioch in Pisidia, so named to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria, which was the great capital of the East. There the Jews, as in many other cities of Asia, had their synagogue where on Saturdays they gathered to listen to the explanation of the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The two apostles also attended, along with many Jews and Gentiles who already worshipped the true God. According to the custom of the Jews, the teachers of the law read a passage from the Bible and then gave it to Paul with the request to say something edifying to them. Paul, who was waiting for the opportunity to speak, stood up, gestured with his hand for everyone to be silent,

and began to speak thus: "Children of Israel, and you all who fear the Lord, since you invite me to speak, I ask you to listen to me with the attention that the dignity of the things I am about to tell you deserves.

"The God who chose our fathers when they were in Egypt and through a series of wonders made them a privileged nation, has particularly honoured the lineage of David by promising that he would raise the Saviour of the world from it. That great promise, confirmed by so many prophecies, has finally been fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. John, whom you certainly believe, the John whose sublime virtues made people believe he was the Messiah, gave the most authoritative testimony about him, saying that he did not consider himself worthy to untie even the straps of his sandals. You today, brothers, you worthy sons of Abraham, and you all worshippers of the true God, of whatever nation or lineage you may be, are those to whom the word of salvation is particularly addressed. The inhabitants of Jerusalem, deceived by their leaders, did not want to recognise the Redeemer we preach to you. Rather, they put him to death; but Almighty God did not allow, as he had predicted, that the body of his Christ should suffer corruption in the tomb. Therefore, on the third day after his death, he raised him glorious and triumphant.

"Up to this point, you have no blame, for the light of truth had not yet reached you. But tremble from now on if you ever close your eyes; tremble at bringing down upon yourselves the curse thundered by the prophets against anyone who does not want to recognise the great work of the Lord, the fulfilment of which must take place in these days."

Having finished his speech, all the listeners withdrew in silence, meditating on the things they had heard from Saint Paul.

However, different thoughts occupied their minds. The good were filled with joy at the words of salvation announced to them, but a large part of the Jews, still convinced that the Messiah should restore the temporal power

of their nation and ashamed to recognise the one whom their leaders had condemned to a shameful death as the Messiah, received Paul's preaching with displeasure. Nevertheless, they showed themselves satisfied and invited the Apostle to return the following Saturday, with a very different spirit: the malicious to prepare to contradict him, and those who feared the Lord, both Israelites and Gentiles, to better instruct themselves and strengthen their faith. On the appointed day, an immense crowd gathered to hear this new doctrine. As soon as Saint Paul began to preach, the teachers from the synagogue rose up against him. They initially presented some difficulties; when they realised they could not resist the strength of the arguments with which Saint Paul proved the truths of the faith, they resorted to shouting, insults, and blasphemies. The two apostles, seeing the word stifled in their mouths, boldly exclaimed in a loud voice: "It was necessary in the first place to announce the divine word to you; but since you stubbornly close your ears and furiously reject it, you render yourselves unworthy of eternal life. We therefore turn to the Gentiles to fulfil the promise made by God through the mouth of his prophet when he said: 'I have destined you to be a light to the Gentiles and for their salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

The Jews then, even more moved by envy and indignation, stirred up a fierce persecution against the Apostles.

They made use of some women who enjoyed a reputation for being pious and honest, and together with them incited the magistrates of the city, and all together, shouting and clamouring, forced the Apostles to leave their borders. Thus compelled, Paul and Barnabas departed from that unfortunate land, and at the moment of their departure, according to the command of Jesus Christ, they shook the dust from their feet as a sign of renouncing forever any relationship with them, as people rejected by God and struck by divine curse.

## **CHAPTER VI. Saint Paul preaches in other cities – Performs a miracle in Lystra, where he is then stoned and left for dead – Year of Jesus Christ 45**

Paul and Barnabas, driven out of Pisidia, went to Lycaonia, another province of Asia Minor, and went to Iconium which was its capital. The holy Apostles, seeking only the glory of God, forgetting the mistreatment they had received in Antioch from the Jews, immediately began preaching the Gospel in the synagogue. Here God blessed their labours, and a multitude of Jews and Gentiles embraced the faith. But those among the Jews who remained unbelieving and persisted in wickedness stirred up another persecution against the Apostles. Some welcomed them as men sent by God, while others proclaimed them impostors. Therefore, having been warned that many of them, protected by the leaders of the synagogue and the magistrates, wanted to stone them, they went to Lystra and then to Derbe, a city not far from Iconium. These cities and the surrounding areas became the field where our zealous workers began to sow the word of the Lord. Among the many miracles that God performed through Saint Paul during this mission, the one we are about to recount was remarkable.

In Lystra, there was a man who had been crippled from birth and had never been able to take a step with his feet. Having heard that Saint Paul was performing astonishing miracles, he felt a lively confidence in his heart that he too could obtain healing through this means, as many others had already done. He was listening to the Apostle's preaching when Paul, gazing intently at the unfortunate man and perceiving the good dispositions of his soul, said in a loud voice: "Stand up and walk on your feet." At such a command, the cripple stood up and began to walk swiftly. The multitude that had witnessed this miracle was filled with enthusiasm and wonder. "These men are not human," they exclaimed from all sides, "but are gods in human form come down from heaven among

us." According to this erroneous assumption, they called Barnabas Jupiter, because he appeared to them more majestic, and Paul, who spoke with wonderful eloquence, they called Mercury, who among the Gentiles was the interpreter and messenger of Jupiter and the god of eloquence. When the news of the event reached the priest at the temple of Jupiter, who was outside the city, he deemed it his duty to offer a solemn sacrifice to the great guests and invited all the people to take part. Having prepared the victims, the crowns, and everything necessary for the ceremony, they brought everything before the house where Paul and Barnabas were staying, wanting in every way to make a sacrifice to them. The two Apostles, filled with holy zeal, rushed into the crowd and, in a sign of sorrow, tearing their clothes, cried out: "Oh, what are you doing, you miserable people? We are mortal men like you; we urge you with all our spirit to turn from the worship of gods to the worship of the Lord who created heaven and earth, and who, although in the past he tolerated the Gentiles and their follies, has nevertheless provided clear arguments of his being and his infinite goodness through works that make him known as the supreme master of all things."

At such frank speaking, the people's spirits calmed, and they abandoned the idea of making the sacrifice. The priests had not yet completely given in and were perplexed about whether they should desist when some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium, sent by the synagogues to disturb the holy endeavours of the Apostles. Those wicked men did so much and said so much that they managed to turn the whole crowd against the two Apostles. Thus, those who had venerated them as gods just a few days earlier now shouted that they were wrongdoers; and since Saint Paul had spoken in particular, the anger was directed entirely at him.

They unleashed such a storm of stones upon him that, believing him to be dead, they dragged him out of the city. See, O reader, what account you must make of the glory of the world! Those who today would elevate you above the stars may tomorrow wish you in the deepest abyss! Blessed are

those who place their trust in God.

## **CHAPTER VII. Paul miraculously healed – Other apostolic labours – Conversion of Saint Thecla**

The disciples, along with other faithful, having heard or perhaps seen what had been done to Paul, gathered around his body, mourning him as dead. But they were soon consoled; for whether Paul was truly dead or merely badly beaten, God made him return healthy and vigorous in an instant, to the point that he was able to get up by himself and, surrounded by the disciples, return to the city of Lystra among the very same people who had just stoned him.

But the next day, having left that city, he went to Derbe, another city in Lycaonia. Here he preached Jesus Christ and made many conversions. Paul and Barnabas visited many cities where they had already preached and, observing the serious dangers to which those who had recently come to the faith were exposed, appointed Bishops and Priests to take care of those churches.

Among the conversions made during this third mission of Paul, the one of Saint Thecla is very famous. While he was preaching in Iconium, this young woman went to listen to him. Previously, she had dedicated herself to the liberal arts and the study of secular philosophy. Her relatives had already promised her to a young nobleman, rich and very powerful. One day, while listening to Saint Paul preach about the value of virginity, she felt herself fall in love with this precious virtue. Upon hearing the great esteem that the Saviour had for it and the great reward reserved in heaven for those who have the good fortune to preserve it, she felt a burning desire to consecrate herself to Jesus Christ and renounce all the advantages of earthly marriage. At her refusal of that marriage, which appeared advantageous in the eyes of the world, her relatives were greatly indignant, and,

in agreement with the groom, tried every means, every flattery to make her change her mind. All in vain: when a soul is wounded by the love of God, every human effort fails to divert it from the object it loves. In fact, the relatives, the groom, and the friends, turning love into fury, incited the judges and magistrates of Iconium against the holy virgin, and from threats they moved to actions.

She was thrown into a den of hungry and ferocious beasts; Thecla, armed only with confidence in God, made the sign of the Holy Cross, and those animals laid down their ferocity and respected the bride of Jesus Christ. A fire was lit into which she was thrown; but as soon as she made the sign of the Cross, the flames were extinguished, and she remained unharmed. In short, she was subjected to every kind of torment and was miraculously delivered from all. For these things, she was given the name of protomartyr, that is, the first martyr among women, just as Saint Stephen was the first martyr among men. She lived many more years practising the most heroic virtues and died in peace at a very old age.

## **CHAPTER VIII. Saint Paul goes to confer with Saint Peter – Attends the Council of Jerusalem – Year of Christ 50**

After the labours and sufferings endured by Paul and Barnabas during their third mission, content with the souls they had managed to bring to the fold of Jesus Christ, they returned to Antioch in Syria. There they recounted to the faithful of that city the wonders performed by God in the conversion of the Gentiles. The Holy Apostle was consoled there with a revelation, in which God commanded him to go to Jerusalem to confer with Saint Peter about the Gospel he had preached. God had commanded this so that Saint Paul would recognise in Saint Peter the Head of the Church, and thus all the faithful would understand how the two leaders of the Apostles preached the same faith, one God, one baptism, one

Saviour Jesus Christ.

Paul set out in the company of Barnabas, bringing with him a disciple named Titus who had been won to the faith during this third mission. This is the famous Titus who became a model of virtue, a faithful follower and collaborator of our holy Apostle, and of whom we will also have much to say. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they presented themselves to the Apostles Peter, James, and John, who were considered the main pillars of the Church. Among other things, it was agreed there that Peter, along with James and John, would apply himself in a special way to lead the Jews to the faith; while Paul and Barnabas would dedicate themselves primarily to the conversion of the Gentiles.

Paul stayed fifteen days in that city, after which he returned with his companions to Antioch. There they found the faithful very agitated over a question arising from the fact that the Jews wanted to compel the Gentiles to submit to circumcision and the other ceremonies of the law of Moses, which was the same as saying that it was necessary to become a good Jew in order to then become a good Christian. The disputes went so far that, unable to quiet them otherwise, it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to consult the Head of the Church so that the matter could be resolved by him.

We have already recounted in the life of Saint Peter how God, with a wonderful revelation, had made known to this prince of the Apostles that the Gentiles, coming to the faith, were not obliged to circumcision nor to the other ceremonies of the law of Moses; however, in order that the will of God might be known to all and that every difficulty might be solemnly resolved, Peter gathered a universal council, which became the model for all the councils that would be celebrated in future times. There, Paul and Barnabas presented the state of the question which was defined by Saint Peter and confirmed by the other Apostles in the following manner:

“The Apostles and elders to the brothers converted



from paganism who dwell in Antioch and in other parts of Syria and Cilicia. Having heard that some from here have troubled and distressed your consciences with arbitrary ideas, it seemed good to us, gathered here, to choose and send to you Paul and Barnabas, men very dear to us, who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. With them we send Silas and Judas, who will deliver our letters to you and will confirm the same truths to you verbally. For it has been judged by the Holy Spirit and by us not to impose on you any other law, except those you must observe, namely to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from strangled animals, and from fornication; abstaining from these things you will do well. Stay in peace."

This last matter, namely fornication, did not need to be prohibited as it is entirely contrary to the dictates of reason and prohibited by the sixth commandment of the Decalogue. However, this prohibition was renewed regarding the Gentiles, who in the worship of their false gods thought it was permissible, indeed a pleasing thing to those filthy deities.

When Paul and Barnabas, along with Silas and Judas, arrived in Antioch, they published the letter with the council's decree, which not only quelled the tumult but filled the brothers with joy, each recognizing the voice of God in that of Saint Peter and the council. Silas and Judas greatly contributed to that common joy, as they were prophets, that is, filled with the Holy Spirit and endowed with the gift of divine speech and a particular grace to interpret the divine Scriptures, and they were very effective in confirming the faithful in faith, concord, and good intentions.

Saint Peter, having been informed of the extraordinary progress that the Gospel was making in Antioch, also wanted to visit the faithful to whom he had already preached for many years and among whom he had held the Pontifical See for seven years. While the two leaders of the Apostles were staying in Antioch, it happened that Peter, to please the Jews, practised some ceremonies of the Mosaic law.

This caused a certain aversion on the part of the Gentiles, without Saint Peter being aware of it. Saint Paul, having learned of this fact, publicly warned Saint Peter, who received the advice with admirable humility without uttering words of excuse; rather, from then on, he became very friendly with Saint Paul, and in his letters he would not call him by any other name than that of dearest brother. An example worthy of imitation by those who are in any way warned of their faults.

## **CHAPTER IX. Paul separates from Barnabas – Travels through various cities of Asia – God sends him to Macedonia – In Philippi, he converts Lydia's family – Year of Christ 51**

Paul and Barnabas preached the Gospel for some time in the city of Antioch, even working to spread it in the nearby countries. Not long after, Paul thought it would be good to visit the Churches to which he had preached. He said to Barnabas, "I think it is good that we return to see the faithful in those cities and lands where we have preached, to see how things are going in terms of religion among them." Nothing was closer to Barnabas's heart, and therefore he immediately agreed with the Holy Apostle; but he proposed to take with them John Mark, who had followed them on the previous mission and had then left them in Perga. Perhaps he wanted to erase the stain he had made on that occasion, so he wanted to be in their company again. Saint Paul did not judge it that way: "You see," he said to Barnabas, "that this man is not someone to be trusted: surely you remember when we arrived in Perga of Pamphylia how he abandoned us." Barnabas insisted that he could be welcomed, and he presented good reasons. Unable to agree, the two Apostles decided to separate from each other and go their separate ways.

Thus God made use of this difference of opinion

for his greater glory; for, separated, they brought the light of the Gospel to more places, which they would not have done if they had both gone together.

Barnabas went with John Mark to the island of Cyprus and visited those Churches where he had preached with Saint Paul on the previous mission. This Apostle worked hard to spread the faith of Jesus Christ and was finally crowned with martyrdom in Cyprus, his homeland. John Mark was steadfast this time, and we will later see him as a faithful companion of Saint Paul, who praised his zeal and charity greatly.

Saint Paul took with him Silas, who had been appointed as a companion to carry the acts of the Jerusalem council to Antioch. He undertook his fourth journey and went to visit various Churches he had founded. He first went to Derbe, then to Lystra, where some time earlier the Holy Apostle had been left for dead. But God wanted to compensate him this time for what he had previously suffered.

He found there a young man he had converted on the other mission, named Timothy. Paul had already known the fine character of this disciple and in his heart had decided to make him a collaborator of the Gospel, that is, to consecrate him as a priest and take him as a companion in his apostolic work. However, before conferring sacred ordination, Paul asked for information from the faithful in Lystra and found that everyone praised this good young man, extolling his virtue, modesty, and spirit of prayer; and not only those from Lystra said this but even those from Iconium and the other nearby cities, and all foresaw in Timothy a zealous priest and a holy bishop.

With these glowing testimonies, Paul had no further difficulty in consecrating him as a priest. Paul then, taking Timothy and Silas with him, continued the visit to the Churches, recommending to all to observe and hold firm to the decisions of the Jerusalem council. Those in Antioch had done so, and so did the preachers of the Gospel at all times to assure the faithful not to fall into error: namely, to adhere

to the decrees, the orders of the councils and of the Roman Pontiff, successor of Saint Peter.

Paul and his companions crossed Galatia and Phrygia to bring the Gospel to Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade him.

To facilitate the understanding of the things we are about to recount, it is good to note in passing that in a broad sense the word 'Asia' we mean one of the three parts of the world. The whole expanse of Asia, except for the part called *Asia Minor* which is now *Anatolia*, is usually referred to as *Greater Asia*, which is the peninsula between the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Black Sea. A part of Asia Minor was also called Proconsular Asia, more or less extensive according to the number of provinces entrusted to the government of the Roman proconsul. Here, by Asia, where Saint Paul planned to go, we mean a portion of Proconsular Asia located around Ephesus and bordered by Mount Taurus, the Black Sea, and Phrygia.

Saint Paul then thought of going to Bithynia, which is another province of Asia Minor a bit more towards the Black Sea; but even that was not permitted by God. Therefore, he returned and went to Troas, which is a city and province where there was once a famous city called *Troy*. God had reserved the preaching of the Gospel to those peoples for another time; for now he wanted to send Paul to other countries.

While Saint Paul was in Troas, an angel appeared to him dressed as a man according to the custom of the Macedonians. Standing before him, he began to plead: "*Please! Have mercy on us; cross over to Macedonia and come to our aid.*" From this vision, Saint Paul understood the will of the Lord and without delay prepared to cross the sea to go to Macedonia.

In Troas, a cousin of Saint Paul named Luke joined him, who proved to be a great help in his apostolic labours. He was a physician from Antioch, of great intellect, who wrote Greek with purity and elegance. He was to Paul what Saint Mark

was to Saint Peter; and like him, he wrote the Gospel that we read under the name of the *Gospel according to Luke*. The book titled *Acts of the Apostles*, from which we derive almost everything we say about Saint Paul, is also the work of Saint Luke. Since he joined as a companion of our Apostle, there was no longer any danger, toil, or suffering that could shake his steadfastness.

Paul, therefore, according to the angel's advice, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, embarked from Troas, sailed the Aegean Sea (which separates Europe from Asia), and with a prosperous voyage arrived at the island of Samothrace, then to Neapolis, not the capital of the Kingdom of Naples but a small town on the border of Thrace and Macedonia. Without stopping, the Apostle went directly to Philippi, the main city, so named because it was built by a king of that country named Philip. There they stayed for some time.

The Jews had no synagogue in that city, either because they were prohibited or because they were too few in number. They had only a *proseucha*, or place of prayer, which we call an oratory. On the Sabbath, Paul and his companions went out of the city to the riverbank where they found a *proseucha* with some women inside. They immediately began to preach the kingdom of God to that simple audience. A merchant named Lydia was the first to be called by God; thus, she and her family received Baptism.

This pious woman, grateful for the benefits received, begged her teachers and the fathers of her soul: "If you judge me faithful to God, do not deny me a grace after that of Baptism which I acknowledge comes from you. Come to my house, stay as long as you like, and consider it as yours." Paul did not want to agree; but she insisted so much that he had to accept. This is the fruit that the word of God produces when it is well listened to. It generates faith; but it must be heard and explained by the sacred ministers, as Saint Paul himself said: "*Fides ex auditu, auditus autem per verbum Christi*" (Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ).

## CHAPTER X. Saint Paul frees a girl from the devil – He is beaten with rods – He is put in prison – Conversion of the jailer and his family – Year of Christ 51

Saint Paul and his companions went here and there spreading the seed of the word of God throughout the city of Philippi. One day, going to the *proseucha*, they encountered a fortune-teller, whom we would call a *sorceress* or *witch*. She had a devil in her that spoke through her mouth and predicted many extraordinary things; which greatly benefited her masters, as ignorant people went to consult her and had to pay well for the predictions. She then began to follow Saint Paul and his companions, shouting behind them: "These men are servants of the Most High God; they show you the way of salvation." Saint Paul let her speak without saying anything, until, annoyed and indignant, he turned to the evil spirit that spoke through her and said in a threatening tone: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to come out of this girl immediately." Saying and doing was one and the same, for, compelled by the powerful name of Jesus Christ, it had to leave that body, and due to its departure the sorceress was left without magic.

You, O readers, will understand the reason why the devil praised Saint Paul, and why this holy Apostle rejected the praises. The evil spirit wanted Saint Paul to leave it in peace, and thus for people to believe that the doctrine of Saint Paul was the same as the predictions of the possessed woman. The holy Apostle wanted to demonstrate that there was no agreement between Christ and the devil, and by refusing its flattery he showed how great the power of the name of Jesus Christ is over all the spirits of hell.

The girl's masters, having seen that all hope of profit from the devil was gone, were greatly indignant against Saint Paul and, without waiting for any command, took him and his companions and led them to the Palace of Justice. Arriving

before the judges, they said: "These men of Jewish race are disturbing our city by introducing a new religion, which is certainly sacrilege." The people, hearing that their religion was offended, became furious and rushed against them from all sides.

The judges were full of indignation and, tearing their clothes, without any trial, without examining whether there was a crime or not, ordered that Paul and Silas be fiercely beaten with rods, and when they were either satisfied or tired of beating them, they ordered that Paul and Silas be taken to prison, imposing on the jailer to guard them with the utmost diligence. This man not only locked them in prison but, for greater security, fastened their feet in stocks. Those holy men, in the horror of the prison, covered in wounds, far from complaining, rejoiced with joy and during the night sang praises to God. The other prisoners were amazed.

It was midnight, and they were still singing and blessing God when suddenly a very strong earthquake was felt. With a horrible crash it shook the building to its foundations. At this shock, the chains fell from the prisoners, their stocks broke, the prison doors opened, and all the detainees found themselves free. The jailer woke up and, running to find out what had happened, found the doors open. Then not doubting that the prisoners had escaped, and therefore perhaps he himself would have to pay with his life, he ran in despair, and drawing a sword, he pointed it at his chest and was about to kill himself. Paul, either by the brightness of the moon or by the light of some lamp, seeing the man in such an act of despair, shouted, "Stop! Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." Reassured by these words, he calmed down a bit and, having a light brought to him, entered the prison and found the prisoners each in their place. Overcome with wonder and moved by the inner light of God's grace, trembling all over he fell at the feet of Paul and Silas, saying, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Everyone can imagine how much joy Paul felt in his heart at such words! He turned to him and replied, "Believe in

the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your whole family."

Without delay the good man took the holy prisoners to his house, washed their wounds with the love and reverence he would have shown his father. Then gathering his family, they were taught the truth of the faith. Listening with humble hearts to the word of God, they quickly learned what was necessary to become Christians. Thus Saint Paul, seeing them filled with faith and the grace of the Holy Spirit, baptized them all. Then they began to thank God for the benefits received. These new believers, seeing Paul and Silas exhausted and weak from the beatings and long fasting, immediately ran to prepare dinner for them, and they were refreshed. The two Apostles found great comfort in the souls they had won for Jesus Christ; therefore, filled with gratitude to God they returned to prison waiting for the arrangements that divine Providence would make known to them regarding their situation.

Meanwhile, the magistrates regretted having had those whom they could not find any fault with beaten and imprisoned, and sent some officers to tell the jailer to release the two prisoners. Overjoyed by this news, the jailer immediately ran to communicate it to the Apostles. "You can surely go in peace" he said. But it seemed to Paul that it things should be done differently. If they had secretly escaped it would have been believed that they were guilty of a serious crime, which would harm the Gospel. Therefore, he called the officers to him and said, "Your magistrates, without having knowledge of this case, without any form of judgment, have publicly beaten us who are Roman citizens; and now they want to send us away secretly. Certainly, it will not be so: let them come themselves and lead us out of prison." The messengers brought this response to the magistrates. When they understood that they were Roman citizens, they were seized with great fear, because beating a Roman citizen was a capital crime. So they immediately came to the prison and with kind words apologised for what they had done and, leading them



out of prison honourably, they begged them to leave the city. The Apostles immediately went to Lydia's house where they found their companions in distress because of them; and they were greatly consoled to see them set free. After that, they departed from the city of Philippi. Thus the citizens rejected the graces of the Lord for the graces of men.

## **CHAPTER XI. St Paul preaches in Thessalonica – The Jason affair – He goes to Berea where he is again disturbed by the Jews – Year of Christ 52**

Paul, along with his companions, left Philippi, leaving behind the two families of Lydia and the jailer who had been won over to Jesus Christ. Passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia, he arrived in Thessalonica, the main city of Macedonia, very famous for its trade and its port on the Aegean Sea. Today it is called Salonika.

There, God had prepared many sufferings and many souls to be won for Christ for the holy Apostle. He began to preach and for three Sabbaths continued to prove with the Holy Scriptures that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that the things that had happened to him had been foretold by the Prophets. Therefore, one had to either renounce the prophecies or believe in the coming of the Messiah. Some believed this preaching and embraced the faith, but others, especially Jews, were obstinate and rose up against St Paul with great hatred. They followed the lead of some wicked men from the rabble, gathered together, and in groups made a commotion throughout the city. And since Silas and Paul had taken lodging with a certain Jason, they stormed his house to drag them out and bring them before the people. The faithful noticed this in time and managed to help them escape. Unable to find them, they took Jason along with some faithful and dragged them before the city magistrates, shouting loudly: "These troublemakers of the human race have come here from

Philippi; and Jason has welcomed them into his house; now these men are transgressing the decrees and violating the majesty of Caesar by claiming that there is another King, namely Jesus of Nazareth." These words inflamed the Thessalonians and stirred up the magistrates to fury. But Jason, having assured them that there would be no riot and that, should they ask for these foreigners, he would present them to them, were satisfied and the disturbance subsided. But Silas and Paul, seeing all efforts in that city useless, followed the advice of their brothers and went to Berea, another city in that province.

In Berea, Paul began to preach in the Jewish synagogue, that is, he put himself in the same danger from which he had just been almost miraculously freed. But this time his courage was richly rewarded. The Bereans listened eagerly to the Word of God. Paul always cited passages from the Bible that concerned Jesus Christ, and the listeners immediately ran to check and verify the texts he quoted; and finding them to correspond exactly, they bowed to the truth and believed in the Gospel. This is what the Saviour with the Jews in Palestine when he invited them to read the Holy Scriptures carefully: *Scrutamini Scripturas, et ipsae testimonium perhibent de me.*

However, the conversions that took place in Berea could not remain hidden to the extent that news of them did reached those in Thessalonica. The obstinate Jews in this city rushed in large numbers to Berea to spoil the work of God and prevent the conversion of the Gentiles. St Paul was primarily sought as the one who particularly supported the preaching. The brothers, seeing him in danger, had him secretly accompanied out of the city by trusted people and, by safe routes, led him to Athens. However, Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. But Paul, when dismissing those who had accompanied him, earnestly recommended that they tell Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. The holy Fathers recognise Christians, in the obstinacy of the Jews in Thessalonica, who are not satisfied with not profiting from

the benefits of religion, but also seek to alienate others, which they do either by slandering the sacred ministers or by despising the things of religion. The Saviour says to them: "The vineyard will be taken away from you," that is, my religion, "and will be given to other peoples who will cultivate it better than you and will bring forth fruit in due time." A terrible threat, but which unfortunately has already come to pass and is coming to pass in many countries where the Christian religion once flourished, but we now see immersed in the thick darkness of error, vice, and disorder. – May God save us from this scourge!

## **CHAPTER XII. The religious situation of the Athenians – St Paul in the Areopagus – Conversion of St Dionysius – Year of Christ 52**

Athens was one of the oldest, richest, and most commercial cities in the world. Science, military valour, philosophers, orators, and poets have always been the masters of humankind there. The Romans themselves had sent to Athens to collect laws that they brought back to Rome as oracles of wisdom. There was also a senate of men considered a mirror of virtue, justice, and prudence; they were called Areopagites, from the Areopagus, the place where they held court. But despite so much knowledge, they were immersed in the shameful ignorance of religious matters. The dominant sects were the Epicureans and the Stoics. The Epicureans denied that God was creator of the world and denied providence, nor did they admit reward or punishment in the afterlife, therefore they placed happiness in earthly pleasures. The Stoics placed the highest good in virtue alone and made man greater than God himself in some things, because they believed they had virtue and wisdom from themselves. All then worshipped multiple gods, and there was no crime that was not favoured by some senseless divinity.

St Paul, unknown and held in contempt because he

was a Jew, had to preach Jesus Christ to them, who was also a Jew who died on the cross, and he had to lead them to worship him as the true God. Therefore only God could make St Paul's words change hearts so steeped in vice and alien to true virtue, and make them embrace and profess the holy Christian religion.

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he felt compassion in his heart for those deceived wretches and, as was his wont, disputed with the Jews and all those who fell out with him sometimes in the synagogues, sometimes in the squares. The Epicureans and the Stoics also came to dispute with him, and, unable to resist the arguments, they began saying: "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others said: "It seems that this man wants to show us some new god." They said this because they heard him mention Jesus Christ and the resurrection. Some others, wanting to act with greater prudence, invited Paul to go to the Areopagus. When he arrived at that magnificent senate they said to him: "Could we know something about this new doctrine of yours? For you bring things to our ears that we never heard before. We desire to know about what you are teaching."

At the news that a foreigner was to speak in the Areopagus, a great crowd of people gathered.

It is worth noting here that it was strictly forbidden among the Athenians to say the slightest word against their countless and foolish deities, and they considered it a capital crime to receive or add any foreign god among them that had not been carefully examined and proposed by the senate. Two philosophers, one named Anaxagoras and the other Socrates, had to lose their lives just for having implied that they could not accept so many ridiculous deities. From these things one can easily understand the danger in which St Paul found himself when preaching the true God to this terrifying assembly and trying to overthrow all their gods.

The holy Apostle, therefore, seeing himself in this august senate and having to speak to the wisest of men,

judged it well to adopt a style and a way of reasoning that was much more elegant than he usually did. And since the senators did not accept the subject of the Scriptures, he thought he would speak with the force of reason. Therefore, standing up and getting all to be silent, he began:

“Men of Athens, I see that in all things you are very religious. For as I passed through this city and considered your objects of worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the Unknown God. Therefore, I come to announce the God whom you worship without knowing it. He is the God who made the world and all things that exist in it. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, and therefore does not dwell in temples made by men. Nor is he served by human hands as if he needed anything; rather, he is the one who gives life, breath to all, and all things. He caused all others to descend from one man, whose descendants extended to inhabit the whole earth. He fixed the times and boundaries of their habitation, that they might seek God if ever they could find him, though he is not far from us.

“For in him we live and move and have our being, as even one of your own poets has said (Aratus, a famous poet from Cilicia): *‘For we are indeed his descendents.’* Being God’s descendents, then, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The God overlooked times of ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

Up to this point, his flippant listeners, whose vices and errors had been attacked with much finesse, had maintained good decorum. But at the first announcement of the extraordinary doctrine of the resurrection, the Epicureans rose up and largely left, mocking the doctrine which certainly instilled terror in them. Others, more discreet, told him that he had said enough for the day, and that they would listen to

him another time on the same subject. This is how the most eloquent of the Apostles was received by that proud assembly. They delayed taking advantage of the grace of God; we do not read that this grace was ever granted to them by God again.

However, God did not fail to console his servant who gained some privileged souls. Among others was Dionysius, one of the judges of the Areopagus, and a woman named Damaris who is believed to have been his wife. It is said of this Dionysius that at the death of the Saviour, observing the eclipse causing darkness to spread over all the earth, he exclaimed: "Either the world is falling apart, or the author of nature is suffering violence." As soon as he could understand the cause of that event he immediately surrendered to the words of St Paul. It is also said that, having gone to visit the Mother of God, he was so astonished by such beauty and majesty that he fell to the ground to venerate her, asserting that he would have worshipped her as a divinity if faith had not assured him that there is only one God. He then came to St Paul, was consecrated as bishop of Athens, and died crowned with martyrdom.

## **CHAPTER XIII. St Paul in Corinth – His stay in Aquila's house – Baptism of Crispus and Sosthenes – He writes to the Thessalonians – Return to Antioch – Year of Jesus Christ 53-54**

If Athens was the most famous city for science, Corinth was considered the foremost for commerce. Merchants from all over converged there. It had two ports on the isthmus of the Peloponnese: one called Cenchreae facing the Aegean, the other called Lechaem overlooking the Adriatic. Disorder and immorality were triumphant there. Despite such obstacles, upon arriving in this city St Paul began to preach publicly and privately.

He took lodging in the house of a Jew named

Aquila. He was a fervent Christian who, to escape the persecution published by Emperor Claudius against Christians, had fled from Italy with his wife named Priscilla and had come to Corinth. They practised the same trade that Paul had learned as a young man, namely, making tents for soldiers. To avoid being a burden to his hosts, the holy Apostle also dedicated himself to work and spent all the time he had free from the sacred ministry in the workshop. Every Saturday, however, he went to the synagogue and endeavoured to make the Jews aware that the prophecies concerning the Messiah had been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

Meanwhile, Silas and Timothy arrived from Berea. They had departed for Athens where they learned that Paul had already left, and they reached him in Corinth. Upon their arrival, Paul devoted himself with greater courage to preaching to the Jews; but as their obstinacy grew every day, and unable to bear so many blasphemies and such abuse of grace, moved by God Paul announced to them the imminent divine scourges with these words: "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am innocent. Behold, I will turn to the Gentiles, and in the future I will be all for them."

Among the Jews who blasphemed Jesus Christ, there were perhaps some who worked in Aquila's workshop; therefore, in order to avoid the company of the wicked, the Apostle left his house and moved to a certain *Titus Justus*, who had recently converted from paganism to the faith. Near Titus lived a certain Crispus, the chief of the synagogue. Instructed by the Apostle, he embraced the faith with all his family.

Paul's great occupations in Corinth did not make him forget his beloved faithful in Thessalonica. When Timothy arrived from there, he told him great things about the fervour of these Christians, their great charity, the good memory they kept of him, and their ardent desire to see him again. Unable to go in person as he wished, Paul wrote them a letter which is believed to be the first letter written by St Paul.

In this letter he rejoices greatly with the

Thessalonians for their faith and charity, then he exhorts them to guard against sensual disorders and every kind of fraud. And since idleness is the source of all vices, he encourages them to dedicate themselves seriously to work, deeming that the one who does not want to work will not be worthy of eating: "If anyone does not want to work, neither let him eat." He then concludes by reminding them of the great reward that God has prepared in heaven for the slightest toil endured in this present life for love of Him.

Shortly after this letter, he received further news from the same faithful in Thessalonica. They were greatly troubled by some who were preaching the imminent universal judgment. The Apostle wrote them a second letter, warning them not to be deceived by their fallacious speeches. He notes that a day of universal judgment is certain, but many signs must first appear, among which is the preaching of the Gospel throughout the earth. He exhorted them to hold fast to the traditions that he had communicated to them by letter and by word of mouth. Finally, he commended himself to their prayers and insisted strongly on fleeing the curious and the idle who are considered the plague of religion and society.

While St Paul was comforting the faithful of Thessalonica, such persecutions arose against him that he would have been led to flee from the city if he had not been comforted by God with a vision. Jesus Christ appeared to him and said: "Do not be afraid, I am with you; no one will be able to harm you; in this city there are many who will be converted to the faith through you." Encouraged by such words, the Apostle stayed in Corinth for eighteen months.

The conversion of Sosthenes was among those that brought great consolation to Paul's soul. He succeeded Crispus in the position of chief of the synagogue. The conversion of these two main representatives of their sect fiercely irritated the Jews, and in their fury they took the Apostle and brought him before the proconsul, accusing him of teaching a religion contrary to that of the Jews. Gallius, such was the governor's name, hearing that it was a matter of religion, did



not want to get involved as a judge. He limited himself to responding: "If it were a matter of some injustice or public wrongdoing, I would gladly listen to you; but since it concerns issues belonging to religion, you take care of it; I do not intend to judge in these matters." The proconsul believed that questions and differences regarding religion should be discussed by priests and not by civil authorities, and for this reason, his response was wise.

Indignant at such a dismissal, the Jews turned against Sosthenes, and they even incited the court officials to join them in beating him in front of Gallius, without him prohibiting them. Sosthenes endured the affront with invincible patience and, as soon as he was released, joined Paul and became his faithful companion in his travels.

Seeing himself miraculously freed from such a grave storm, Paul made a vow to God in thanksgiving. The vow was similar to that of the Nazarenes, which particularly consisted of abstaining for a given time from wine and anything else that could intoxicate, and letting his hair grow, which among the ancients was a sign of mourning and penance. When the time of the vow was to end, a sacrifice had to be made in the temple with various ceremonies prescribed by the law of Moses.

Having fulfilled part of his vow, in the company of Aquila and Priscilla, St Paul embarked for Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor. According to his custom, Paul went to visit the synagogue and disputed several times with the Jews. These disputes were peaceful; indeed, the Jews invited him to stay longer; but Paul wanted to continue his journey to be in Jerusalem and fulfil his vow. However, he promised the faithful that he would return, and as a pledge of his return, he left Aquila and Priscilla with them. From Ephesus, St Paul embarked for Palestine and arrived at Caesarea where, disembarking, he walked on foot toward Jerusalem. He went to visit the faithful of this Church and, having fulfilled the things for which he had undertaken the journey, came to Antioch, where he stayed for some time.

Everything is worthy of admiration in this great Apostle. Here we note only one thing that he warmly recommends to the faithful of Corinth. To give them an important warning on how to remain steadfast in faith he writes: "Brothers, in order not to fall into error, hold fast to the traditions learned from my discourse and from my letter." With these words St Paul commanded them to show the same reverence for the written word of God and for the word of God handed down by tradition, as taught by the Catholic Church.

## **CHAPTER XIV. Apollo in Ephesus – The sacrament of Confirmation – St Paul works many miracles – The case of two Jewish exorcists – Year of Christ 55**

St Paul stayed for some time in Antioch, but seeing that the faithful were sufficiently provided with sacred pastors, he decided to leave to visit the countries where he had already preached once more. This is the fifth journey of our holy Apostle. He went to Galatia, Pontus, Phrygia, and Bithynia; then, according to the promise made, he returned to Ephesus where Aquila and Priscilla were waiting for him. Everywhere he was welcomed, as he himself writes, as an angel of peace.

Between Paul's departure and return to Ephesus, a Jew named Apollo came to this city. He was an eloquent man and deeply instructed in Sacred Scripture. He worshipped the Saviour and preached him zealously, but he knew no other baptism than that preached by St John the Baptist. Aquila and Priscilla noticed that he had a very confused idea of the Mysteries of the Faith and, calling him to themselves, instructed him better in the doctrine, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Desiring to bring the word of salvation to other peoples, St Paul decided to pass into Achaia, that is, Greece. The Ephesians, who for some time admired his virtues and began

to love him as a father, wanted to accompany him with a letter in which they praised his zeal and commended him to the Corinthians. Indeed, he did great good to those Christians. When the Apostle arrived in Ephesus, he found several faithful instructed by Apollo and wanting to know the state of these souls, he asked if they had received the Holy Spirit; that is, if they had received the sacrament of Confirmation, which was usually administered at that time after baptism, and in which the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit was conferred. But the good people replied: "We do not even know that there is a Holy Spirit." The Apostle, astonished at such a response, and having understood that they had only received the baptism of St John the Baptist, commanded that they be baptised again with the baptism of Jesus Christ, that is, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. After that, laying his hands on them, Paul administered the sacrament of Confirmation, and these new faithful received not only the invisible effects of grace but also particular and manifest signs of divine omnipotence which made them speak fluently in tongues they had not understood before, predicting future things and interpreting Sacred Scripture.

St Paul preached for three months in the synagogue, urging the Jews to believe in Jesus Christ. Many believed, but several who were obstinate even blasphemed the holy name of Jesus Christ. Paul, for the honour of the Gospel ridiculed by these wicked individuals and to escape the company of evil people, ceased to preach in the synagogue, broke all communication with them and withdrew to the house of a Gentile Christian named Tyrannus, who was a schoolmaster. St Paul made the school a Church of Jesus Christ. Preaching and explaining the truths of the faith, he attracted Gentiles and Jews from all parts of Asia.

God helped his work by confirming the doctrine preached by his servant with unheard-of miracles. The handkerchiefs, aprons, and bands that had touched Paul's body were carried here and there and placed on the sick and the possessed, and that was enough for diseases and unclean

spirits to immediately flee. This was an unheard of wonder, and God certainly wanted such a fact to be recorded in the Bible to confound those who have so much argued and still argue against the veneration Catholics pay to sacred relics.

Perhaps they want to condemn those first Christians who applied to the sick the handkerchiefs that had touched Paul's body as superstition? Things that St Paul had never prohibited and that God showed to approve with miracles?

Regarding the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ to perform miracles, a very curious event occurred. Among the Ephesians, there were many who claimed to cast out demons from bodies with certain magical words or by using roots of herbs or perfumes. But their results always failed. Some Jewish exorcists, seeing that even Paul's garments cast out demons, were filled with envy and tried, as St Paul did, to use the name of Jesus Christ to cast the devil out of a man. "I adjure you," they kept saying, "and command you to come out of this body by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." The devil, who knew things better than they did, answered through the possessed: "I know Jesus and I know who Paul is; but you are impostors. What right do you have over me?" Having said this, he rushed upon them, beat them, and struck them so that two of them barely managed to flee, wounded and with their clothes torn to pieces. This astounding event, having spread throughout the city, caused great fear, and no one dared to say the holy name of Jesus Christ except with respect and reverence.

## **CHAPTER XV. Sacrament of Confession – Perverse books burned – Letter to the Corinthians – Uprising for the goddess Diana – Letter to the Galatians – Year of Christ 56-57**

God, who is always merciful, knows how to bring good even from sin itself. The incident of the two exorcists

so badly beaten by the possessed man caused great fear among all the Ephesians, and both Jews and Gentiles hurried to renounce the devil and embrace the faith. It was then that many of those who had believed came in great numbers to confess and declare the evil they had committed in their lives to obtain forgiveness: "They came confessing and declaring their deeds." This is a clear testimony of the sacramental confession commanded by the Saviour and practised since apostolic times.

The first fruit of the confession and repentance of the faithful was to distance themselves from the occasions of sin. Therefore, all those who possessed perverse books, that is, contrary to good morals or religion, handed them over to be burned. So many brought them that they made a pile in the square and lit a bonfire in the presence of all the people, considering it better to burn these books in this life to avoid the eternal fire of hell. The value of the books amounted to almost one hundred thousand francs. However, no one sought to sell them, for it would have been to provide others with an occasion to do harm, which is never permitted. While these things were happening Apollo arrived from Corinth to Ephesus with others, announcing that discord had arisen among those faithful. The holy Apostle worked to remedy this with a letter in which he recommended unity of faith, obedience to their pastors, mutual charity, especially towards the poor. He urged the rich not to host lavish banquets and abandon the poor in misery. He then insisted that each one purify their conscience before approaching the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, saying: "Whoever eats that Body and drinks that Blood unworthily eats their own judgment and condemnation." It also happened that a young man had committed a grave sin with his stepmother. The saint, to make them understand the horror, commanded that he be separated from the other faithful for some time so that he might come to his senses. This is a true example of excommunication, as the Catholic Church still practises when it excommunicates for serious crimes, that is, declares Christians who are guilty of

them separated from others. Paul sent his disciple Titus to deliver this letter to Corinth. The result seems to have been abundant.

He was in Ephesus when a terrible persecution broke out against him by a silversmith named Demetrius. This man made small silver temples in which a statuette of the goddess Diana was placed, a deity venerated in Ephesus and throughout Asia. This brought him trade and great profit, as most of the foreigners who came to the festivals of Diana took these tokens of devotion with them. Demetrius was the main craftsman and thus provided work and sustenance for the families of many workers.

As the number of Christians grew, the number of buyers of the statuettes of Diana decreased. So, one day Demetrius gathered a large number of citizens and demonstrated how Paul would make them all die of hunger, since he had no other means to live. "At least," he added, "it would only concern our private interest; but the temple of our great goddess, so celebrated throughout the world, is about to be abandoned." At these words he was interrupted by a thousand different voices shouting in the most furious confusion: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The whole city was thrown into an uproar; they ran about shouting in search of Paul and, not being able to find him immediately, dragged two of his companions named Gaius and Aristarchus along with them. A Jew named Alexander wanted to speak. But as soon as he could open his mouth, they began to shout even louder from all sides: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians! How great is Diana of the Ephesians!" This cry was repeated for two whole hours.

Paul wanted to step forward in the midst of the tumult to speak, but some brothers, knowing that he would expose himself to certain death, prevented him. God, however, who holds the hearts of men in his hands, restored full calm among the people in an unexpected way. A wise man, a simple secretary and, as it appears, a friend of Paul, managed to calm the fury. As soon as he could speak he said: "And who

does not know that the city of Ephesus has a particular devotion and worship towards the great Diana, daughter of Jupiter? Since this is believed by all, you must not be disturbed nor resort to such a reckless remedy, as if such devotion established by all ages could fall into doubt. As for Gaius and Aristarchus, I will tell you that they are not convicted of any blasphemy against Diana. If Demetrius and his companions have anything against them, let them bring the case before the court. If we continue in these public demonstrations, we will be accused of sedition." At those words the tumult calmed down and everyone returned to their own occupations.

After this uproar Paul wanted to leave immediately for Macedonia, but he had to postpone his departure due to some disorders that had occurred among the faithful in Galatia. Some false preachers began to discredit Saint Paul and his preaching, claiming that his doctrine was different from that of the other Apostles and that circumcision and the ceremonies of the law of Moses were absolutely necessary.

The holy Apostle wrote a letter in which he demonstrated the conformity of doctrine between himself and the Apostles; he proves that many matters to do with the law of Moses were no longer necessary for salvation; he recommended they be very careful of false preachers and to glory only in Jesus, in whose name he wished peace and blessings.

Having sent the letter to the faithful in Galatia, he departed for Macedonia after having stayed three years in Ephesus, that is, from year fifty-four to year fifty-seven of Jesus Christ. During Saint Paul's stay in Ephesus, God made him know in spirit that he was calling him to Macedonia, to Greece, to Jerusalem, and to Rome.

## **CHAPTER XVI. Saint Paul returns to**

## **Philippi – Second Letter to the faithful of Corinth – He goes to this city – Letter to the Romans – His prolonged preaching in Troas – He raises a dead man – Year of Christ 58**

Before leaving Ephesus, Paul summoned the disciples and, having given them a fatherly exhortation, embraced them tenderly; then he set out on his journey to Macedonia. He wished to stay for some time in Troas where he hoped to meet his disciple Titus; but, not having found him and wishing to quickly know about the state of the Church in Corinth, he left Troas, crossed the Hellespont, which today is called the Dardanelles Strait, and passed into Macedonia where he had to suffer greatly for the faith.

But God prepared for him a great consolation with the arrival of Titus, who reached him in the city of Philippi. This disciple explained to the holy Apostle how his letter had produced beneficial effects among the Christians in Corinth, that the name of Paul was very dear to all, and that everyone was burning with the desire to see him soon.

To give vent to the fatherly feelings of his heart, the Apostle wrote a second letter from Philippi in which he showed all tenderness towards those who remained faithful and reproved some who sought to pervert the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Having then understood that the young man, excommunicated after his first letter, had sincerely converted, and indeed hearing from Titus that the sorrow had almost driven him to despair, the holy Apostle recommended that he be treated with care, absolved him from excommunication, and restored him to communion with the faithful. He recommended many things to be communicated verbally through Titus, who was the bearer of the letter. Other disciples accompanied Titus on this journey, among whom was Saint Luke, who had been bishop of Philippi for some



years. Saint Paul consecrated Saint Epaphroditus as bishop for that city, and thus Saint Luke became once again a companion of the holy master in the labours of the apostolate.

From Macedonia Paul went to Corinth, where he arranged what concerned the celebration of the holy mysteries, as he had promised in his first letter, which should be understood as the rites that are commonly observed in all Churches, such as fasting before Holy Communion and other similar things that concern the administration of the Sacraments.

The Apostle spent the winter in this city, working to console his children in Jesus Christ who were not satisfied with listening to him and admiring him as a zealous pastor and a tender father.

From Corinth he also extended his concerns to other peoples and especially to the Romans who had already been converted to the faith by Saint Peter after years of toil and suffering. Aquila, with some of his friends, having learned that the persecution had ceased, had gone back to Rome. Paul learned from them that dissensions had arisen between Gentiles and Jews in that metropolis of the empire. The Gentiles reproached the Jews for not having responded to the benefits received from God, and their ingratitude in nailing the Saviour to the cross; the Jews, for their part, reproached the Gentiles for having followed idolatry and worshipped the most infamous deities. The holy Apostle wrote his famous *Letter to the Romans*, full of sublime arguments which he treated with the sharpness of mind characteristic of a learned and holy man who writes inspired by God. It is not possible to abbreviate it without risking altering its meaning. It is the longest, the most elegant of all the letters, and the one most full of erudition. I urge you, O reader, to read it carefully, but with the proper interpretations that are customary in the Vulgate. It is the sixth letter of Saint Paul and was written from the city of Corinth in the year 58 of Jesus Christ. But, due to the great respect that has always been shown to the dignity of the

Church of Rome, it is counted as the first among the fourteen letters of this holy Apostle. In this letter Saint Paul does not speak of Saint Peter, because he was occupied in the foundation of other Churches. It was carried by a deaconess, or rather a nun, named Phoebe, whom the Apostle highly commends to the brothers in Rome.

Wishing to leave Corinth to head to Jerusalem, Saint Paul learned that the Jews were plotting to lay traps for him along the way; therefore, instead of embarking at the port of Cenchrea for Jerusalem, Paul turned back and continued his journey through Macedonia. He was accompanied by Sopater, son of Pyrrhus of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy of Lystra, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. They accompanied him as far as Philippi; then, with the exception of Luke, they went on to Troas with orders to wait for him there, while he would remain in this city until after the Passover festivals. After the solemnity had passed, Paul and Luke arrived in Troas after five days of sailing and stayed there for seven days.

It happened that the eve of Paul's departure was the first day of the week, that is, Sunday, on which the faithful used to gather to listen to the word of God and assist at the divine sacrifices. Among other things, they broke bread, that is, celebrated the Holy Mass in which the faithful participated, receiving the Body of the Lord under the appearance of bread. Even then the Mass was considered the most sacred and solemn act for the sanctification of the festive day.

Paul, who was to leave the next day, prolonged his discourse late into the night, and many lamps had been lit to illuminate the upper room. On Sunday, at night, in the upper room on the third floor of the house, the many lamps lit attracted an immense crowd of people. While everyone was intent on Paul's reasoning, a young man named Eutychus, either out of a desire to see the Apostle or to listen to him better, had climbed up on a window and sat on the sill. Now, whether it was due to the heat, the late hour, or perhaps fatigue, the

fact is that the young man fell asleep; and in his sleep, giving in to the weight of his body, he fell down onto the pavement of the public street. A lament was heard resounding through the assembly; they ran and found the young man lifeless.

Paul immediately went down, and, placing his body over the corpse, blessed him, embraced him, and, with his breath or rather with the living faith in God, restored him to new life. After this miracle was performed, without paying attention to the applause that was given from all sides, he went back up to the upper room and continued preaching until morning.

The great solicitude of the faithful of Troas to assist at the sacred functions should serve as a stimulus to all Christians to sanctify festive days with works of piety, especially by devoutly hearing the Holy Mass and listening to the word of God even with some inconvenience.

## **CHAPTER XVII. St Paul preaches at Miletus – His Journey to Caesarea – The Prophecy of Agabus – Year of Christ 58**

After that meeting which lasted about twenty-four hours, the tireless Apostle set out with his companions for Mytilene, a noble city on the island of Lesbos. From there, continuing the journey, he arrived after a few days at Miletus, a city in Caria, a province of Asia Minor. The Apostle did not want to stop in Ephesus so as not to be obliged to delay his journey too much by the Christians there who loved him dearly. He was hurrying with the aim of reaching Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus to inform the bishops and priests of the city and the nearby provinces of his arrival, inviting them to come and visit him and also to confer with him about matters of faith, if it should be necessary. They came in great numbers.

When St Paul saw himself surrounded by those

venerable preachers of the Gospel, he began to explain to them the tribulations he had suffered day and night from the snares of the Jews. "Now I am going to Jerusalem," he said, "led by the Holy Spirit, who, in all the places where I pass, makes me aware of the chains and tribulations that await me in that city. But none of this frightens me, nor do I hold my life more precious than my duty. It matters little to me to live or die, provided I finish my race giving glorious testimony to the Gospel that Jesus Christ has entrusted to me. You will no longer see my face, but take heed of yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made you bishops to govern the Church of God, which he has purchased with his precious blood." He then went on to warn them that after his departure ravenous wolves and perverse men would arise to corrupt the doctrine of Jesus Christ. After saying these words, they all knelt down and prayed together. No one could hold back their tears, and they all threw themselves around Paul's neck, showering him with a thousand kisses. They were especially inconsolable for the words that they would no longer see his face. To enjoy a few more moments of his sweet company, they accompanied him to the ship and reluctantly parted from their dear master.

Paul, along with his companions, from Miletus went to the island of Chios, renowned for a temple of the Gentiles dedicated to Juno and Asclepius. The next day they arrived at Rhodes, an island quite famous especially for its Colossus which was a statue of extraordinary height and size. From there they came to Patara, the capital city of Lycia, renowned for a great temple dedicated to the god Apollo. From here they sailed to Tyre, where the ship was to unload its cargo.

Tyre is the main city of Phoenicia, now called Sur, on the shores of the Mediterranean. As soon as they disembarked, they found some prophets who were proclaiming the evils that awaited the holy Apostle in Jerusalem, and they wanted to dissuade him from the journey. But after seven days, he wanted to depart. Those good Christians, with their wives and children, accompanied him outside the city, where,

kneeling on the beach, they prayed with him. Then, exchanging the warmest greetings, Paul and his companions boarded the ship and was accompanied by the gazes of the Sidonians until the distance of the ship took them out of sight. Arriving at Ptolemais, they stayed one day to greet and comfort the Christians in the faith; then continuing their journey, they arrived in Caesarea.

There Paul was joyfully welcomed by the deacon Philip. This holy disciple, after preaching to the Samaritans, to the eunuch of Queen Candace, and in many cities of Palestine, had settled in Caesarea to care for the souls that he had regenerated in Jesus Christ.

At that time the prophet Agabus came to Caesarea and, having gone to visit the holy Apostle, took off his belt and, binding his own feet and hands with it, said: "Here is what the Holy Spirit openly tells me: the man to whom this belt belongs will be bound in this way by the Jews in Jerusalem."

Agabus' prophecy moved all those present, as the evils that were prepared for the holy Apostle in Jerusalem were becoming increasingly manifest; therefore, Paul's own companions, weeping, begged him not to go there. But Paul courageously replied: "Oh! I beg you, do not weep. With your tears, you are only increasing the affliction in my heart. Know that I am ready not only to suffer chains but also to face death for the name of Jesus Christ."

Then, recognising the will of God in holy Apostle's firmness, all said with one voice: "Let the will of the Lord be done." Having said this, they set out for Jerusalem with a certain Mnason, who had been a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. He had a fixed residence in Jerusalem and was going with them to host them in his house.

## **CHAPTER XVIII. St Paul Presents Himself**

## **to St James – The Jews Lay Traps for Him – He Speaks to the People – He Rebukes the High Priest – Year of Christ 59**

We are now preparing to recount a long series of sufferings and persecutions that the holy Apostle endured during four years of imprisonment. God wanted to prepare his servant for these battles by making him aware of them long before; in fact, foreseen evils cause less fright, and a man is more willing to endure them. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem with his companions, they were welcomed by the Christians of that city with the signs of the greatest goodwill. The next day they went to visit the bishop of the city, who was St James the Less, where the chief priests of the diocese had also gathered. Paul recounted the wonders that God had worked through his ministry among the Gentiles, for which all thanked the Lord from their hearts.

However, they hurried to warn Paul of the danger that loomed over him. "Many Jews," they said to him, "have converted to the faith, and several of them are very zealous for circumcision and legal ceremonies. Now, knowing that you dispense the Gentiles from these observances, there is a terrible hostility against you. It is therefore necessary that you demonstrate that you are not an enemy of the Jews. Do this: on the occasion when four Jews are to complete a vow in these days, you will take part in the ceremony and will bear the expenses necessary for this solemnity."

Paul promptly agreed to the wise counsel and took part in that act of piety. He went to the temple, and the ceremony was nearing its end when some Jews from Asia stirred up the crowd against him, shouting: "Help, Israelites, help! This man is the one who goes throughout the world preaching against the people, against the law, and against this very temple. He has not hesitated to violate its sanctity by bringing Gentiles into it."

Although such accusations were false, the whole

city was stirred up, and a great crowd gathered, seized St Paul, dragged him out of the temple to put him to death as a blasphemer. But when the noise of the tumult reached the Roman tribune, he immediately came with the guards. The rioters, seeing the guards, ceased beating Paul and handed him over to the tribune, who, having him bound, ordered that he be taken to the Antonia Fortress, which was a stronghold and a barracks near the temple. Lysias, such was the name of the tribune, wanted to know the reason for that tumult but could learn nothing, for the cries and shouts of the people drowned out every voice. As Paul was climbing the steps of the fortress, it was necessary for the soldiers to carry him in their arms to remove him from the hands of the Jews, who, unable to have him in their power, were shouting: "Kill him, take him out of the world."

As he was about to enter the tower, he spoke in Greek to the tribune: "May I say a word to you?" The tribune was astonished that he spoke Greek and said to him: "Do you know Greek? Are you not that Egyptian who recently stirred up a rebellion and led four thousand assassins into the desert?" "No, certainly," replied Paul, "I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus, a city of Cilicia. But, if you please, allow me to speak to the people." This being granted to him, Paul, from the steps of the tower, raised his hand, weighed down by the chains, signaled to the people to be silent, and began to explain what concerned his homeland, his conversion, and his preaching, and how God had destined him to bring the faith to the Gentiles.

The people had listened to him in profound silence until these last words; but when they heard him speak of the Gentiles, as if stirred by a thousand furies, they burst into frenzied cries, some throwing their garments to the ground in indignation, others scattering dust in the air, and all shouting: "This man is unworthy to live, let him be taken out of the world!"

The tribune, who had understood nothing of St Paul's speech because he had spoken in Hebrew, fearing that

the people would come to serious excesses, commanded his men to take Paul from their hands and bring him back to the fortress. However, God wanted to comfort his servant for what he had suffered that day. In the night, he appeared to him and said: "Take courage: after you have borne witness to me in Jerusalem, you will do the same in Rome."

## **CHAPTER XIX. Forty Jews vow to kill Saint Paul – A nephew discovers the plot – He is transferred to Caesarea – Year of Christ 59**

The Jews, seeing their plan fail, spent the following night devising various schemes. Forty of them took the desperate resolution to vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. Having arranged this conspiracy, they went to the chief priests and the elders, telling them their intention. "To have that scoundrel in our hands," they added, "we have found a sure way; all that remains is for you to lend us a hand. Let the tribune know, in the name of the Sanhedrin, that you wish to further examine some points of Paul's case and that he should present him to you again tomorrow. He will certainly agree to the request. But be assured that before Paul is brought before you, we will tear him to pieces with our own hands." The elders praised the plan and promised to cooperate.

Either because one of the conspirators did not keep the secret, or because they did not pay attention to closing the door when they devised their plan, it is certain that they were discovered. A son of Paul's sister learned everything and, running to the tower, managed to pass through the guards, present himself to his uncle, and tell him the entire plot. Paul instructed his nephew well on how to act. Then he called an officer who was on guard and said to him, "I ask you to take this young man to the captain; he has something to communicate to him."



The centurion took him to the captain and said, "That Paul who is in prison has asked me to bring you this young man because he has something to tell you." The captain took the young man by the hand and, taking him aside, asked what he had to report. "The Jews," he replied, "have agreed to ask you tomorrow to have Paul brought to the Sanhedrin, under the pretext of wanting to examine his case more thoroughly. But do not listen to them: know that they are laying a trap for him and that forty of them have vowed a terrible vow not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are now ready to act, waiting only for your consent." "Well done," said the captain, "you have done well to tell me these things. Now you may go, but do not tell anyone that you revealed them to me."

From this desperate resolution, Lysias understood that keeping Paul in Jerusalem any longer was equivalent to leaving him in danger from which he might not be able to save him. Therefore, without delay, he called two centurions and said to them, "Order two hundred foot soldiers and as many armed with spears, along with seventy horsemen, to accompany Paul to Caesarea. Also prepare a mount for him so that he may be taken there safe and sound and present himself to Governor Felix." The tribune sent Paul with a letter to the governor, which said:

"Claudius Lysias to the most excellent Governor Felix, greetings. I send you this man who, having been seized by the Jews, was about to be killed by them. I came with my soldiers and rescued him from their hands, having learned that he is a Roman citizen. Wanting to inform myself of what crime he was accused of, I brought him before the Sanhedrin and found that he was accused of matters concerning their law, but without any guilt deserving of death or imprisonment. But having been informed that a plot of death is laid against him, I have decided to send him to you, inviting at the same time his accusers to present themselves before your tribunal to lay out their accusations against him. Farewell."

In execution of the orders received, that very night the soldiers set out with Paul and took him to

Antipatris, a city located halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea. At that point in the journey, no longer fearing an attack from the Jews, they sent the four hundred soldiers back to Jerusalem, and Paul, accompanied by only seventy horsemen, arrived the following day in Caesarea.

Thus God, in the simplest way, freed his Apostle from a grave danger and made it known that the plans of men always come to nothing when they are contrary to the divine will.

## **CHAPTER XX. Paul before the governor – His accusers and his defence – Year of Christ 59**

The next day Paul arrived in Caesarea and was presented to the governor with the letter from Captain Lysias. After reading the letter, the governor called Paul aside and, having learned that he was from Tarsus, said to him, "I will listen to you when your accusers arrive." Meanwhile, he had him kept in the prison at his palace.

The forty conspirators, when they saw their plan fail, were astonished. It can be believed that, disregarding the vow they had made, they began to eat and drink to continue their plot. In agreement with the high priest, the elders, and a certain Tertullus, a famous orator, they set out for Caesarea where they arrived five days after Paul's arrival. Coming before the governor, Tertullus began to speak against Paul: "We have found this man stirring up riots among all the Jews in the world. He is the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even attempted to profane our temple, and we arrested him. We wanted to judge him according to our law, but Captain Lysias intervened, taking him away by force. He has ordered that his accusers present themselves before you. Now we are here. By examining him, you will be able to ascertain the charges we bring against him." What Tertullus had asserted was confirmed by the Jews present.

Paul, having been given the opportunity to respond by the governor, began to defend himself: "Since, most excellent Felix, you have been governing this country for many years, you are certainly able to know the things that have happened here. I gladly defend myself before you. As you can ascertain, it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. In this short time, no one can say that they found me in the temple or in the synagogues or in any public or private place discussing with anyone, nor gathering crowds or inciting riots. They cannot prove any of the accusations they bring against me. But I confess to you that I follow the Way which they call a sect, serving the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and is written in the Prophets. I have in God the same hope that they themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. For this reason, I strive always to have a clear conscience before God and men. After many years, I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was engaged in these rites of purification, without crowd or uprising, some Jews from Asia found me in the temple. They should have appeared before you to accuse me if they had anything against me. Or let these same men say if they found any fault in me when I appeared before the Sanhedrin, apart from this one statement I made aloud among them: 'It is for the resurrection of the dead that I am being judged today before you.'"

His accusers were confounded and, looking at one another, could find no words to say. The governor himself, already inclined in favour of the Christians, knew that far from being seditious, they were the most docile and loyal among his subjects. But he did not want to pronounce a sentence and reserved the right to hear him again when Captain Lysias came from Jerusalem to Caesarea. Meanwhile, he ordered that Paul be kept in custody, but granted him a certain degree of freedom and allowing his friends to serve him.

Some time later, the governor, perhaps to please his wife, who was a Jewess, summoned Paul to his presence to

hear him speak about religion. The Apostle vividly expounded the truths of the faith, the severity of the judgments that God will reserve for the wicked in the afterlife, so much so that Felix, frightened and disturbed, said, "For now, enough; I will listen to you again when I have the opportunity." In reality, he called for him several times, but not to learn about the faith, but hoping that Paul would offer him money in exchange for his freedom. Therefore, although he knew Paul's innocence, he kept him in prison in Caesarea for two years. Thus do those Christians who, for temporary gain or to please men, sell justice and violate the most sacred duties of conscience and religion.

## **CHAPTER XXI. Paul before Festus – His words to King Agrippa – Year of Christ 60**

It had been two years since the holy Apostle was held prisoner when a new governor named Festus succeeded Felix. Three days after taking office, the new governor went to Jerusalem, and immediately the chief priests and the leading Jews presented themselves to him to renew the accusations against the holy Apostle. They asked him as a special favour to have Paul brought to Jerusalem to be judged by the Sanhedrin; but in reality, they intended to assassinate him along the way. Festus, perhaps already warned not to trust them, replied that he would soon return to Caesarea; "Those of you," he said, "who have something against Paul, come with me, and I will hear their accusations."

After a few days, Festus returned to Caesarea, and with him were the Jews accusing Paul. The next day, he summoned the holy Apostle before his tribunal, and the Jews brought many serious accusations against him, but they could not prove them. Paul responded to them with a few words, and his accusers fell silent. However, Festus, wishing to gain the favour of the Jews, asked him if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be judged by the Sanhedrin in his presence. Realizing that Festus was inclined to hand him over to the Jews, Paul

replied: "I stand before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be judged. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you very well know. If therefore I am guilty and have committed anything deserving of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing true in the accusations these men bring against me, no one has the right to deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." This appeal of our Apostle was just and in accordance with Roman law, as the governor showed himself willing to hand over an innocent Roman citizen to the Jews who wanted his death at all costs. The holy Fathers reflect that it was not the desire for life, but the good of the Church that prompted him to appeal to Rome, where by divine revelation he knew how much he had to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Festus, after consulting his council, replied: "You have appealed to Caesar; to Caesar you shall go."

Not many days later, King Agrippa, the son of that Agrippa who had put Saint James the Greater to death and imprisoned Saint Peter, came to Caesarea. He had come with his sister Berenice to pay their respects to the new governor of Judea. After staying several days, Festus spoke to them about Paul's trial. Agrippa expressed a desire to hear him. To please him, Festus had a hall prepared with great pomp and, inviting the tribunes and other magistrates to the hearing, had Paul brought before Agrippa and Berenice. "Behold," said Festus, "this man against whom the whole multitude of the Jews has appealed to me, protesting with loud cries that he ought not to live any longer. But I found nothing in him that deserves death. However, since he has appealed to the emperor, I must send him to Rome. But since I have nothing certain to write to our sovereign, I have deemed it appropriate to present him before you and especially before you, O King Agrippa, that after examining him, you may tell me what I should write, for it does not seem appropriate to me to send a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."

Agrippa, addressing Paul, said: "You are permitted to speak in your defence." Paul began to speak as follows: "I consider myself fortunate, O King Agrippa, to be able to

defend myself today before you against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions that pertain to them. I beg you, therefore, to listen to me patiently. All the Jews know my life from my youth, which was spent among my people and in Jerusalem. They know that I lived according to the strictest sect of our religion, that of the Pharisees. And now I stand trial for the hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, which our twelve tribes hope to see fulfilled by serving God night and day. It is for this hope, O King, that I am accused by the Jews. Why is it considered incredible among you that God raises the dead?

I too thought it my duty to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus I did in Jerusalem: I received authority from the chief priests to imprison many saints, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Often, going from synagogue to synagogue, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and in my furious rage, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

In such circumstances, as I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the road a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. All fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." I said: "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for the purpose of appointing you a minister and a witness of both the things which you have seen of me and of those things in which I will appear to you. I will deliver you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient

to the heavenly vision; but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works befitting repentance. For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. But having obtained help from God, to this day I stand here, witnessing both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ would suffer, and as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to the people and to the Gentiles."

Festus interrupted the Apostle's discourse and exclaimed with a loud voice: "You are mad, Paul; much learning is driving you mad." To this, Paul replied: "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I speak the words of truth and reason. The king, to whom I speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things is hidden from him, for this has not been done in a corner. Do you believe the prophets, O King Agrippa? I know that you do believe." Agrippa said to Paul: "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." And Paul said: "I would to God that, whether short or long, not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

Then the king, the governor, Berenice, and those who sat with them rose up, and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying: "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." And Agrippa said to Festus: "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Thus Paul's address, which should have converted all those judges, was of no avail, for they closed their hearts to the graces that God wanted to grant them. This is a picture of those Christians who listen to the word of God but do not resolve to put into practice the good inspirations that they sometimes feel arise in their hearts.

## **CHAPTER XXII. Saint Paul embarks for Rome – He suffers a terrible storm, from which he is saved with his companions – Year of Jesus Christ 60**

When Festus decided that Paul would be sent to Rome by sea, he, along with many other prisoners, was entrusted to a centurion named Julius. With him were his two faithful disciples Aristarchus and Luke. They boarded a ship from Adramyttium, a seaport city in Asia. Sailing along the coast of Palestine, they arrived at Sidon the next day. The centurion, who was accompanying them, soon realized that Paul was not an ordinary man, and admiring his virtues, began to treat him with respect. After landing at Sidon, he gave him full freedom to visit friends, stay with them, and receive some refreshment.

From Sidon, they sailed along the coasts of the island of Cyprus, and since the wind was somewhat contrary, they crossed the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, which is part of the Mediterranean, and arrived at Myra, a city of Lycia. Here the centurion, having found a ship from Alexandria going to Italy with a cargo of wheat, transferred his passengers to it. But sailing very slowly, they struggled greatly to reach the island of Crete, now called Candia. They stopped at a place called Fair Havens, near Salmone, a city on that island.

The season being very advanced, Paul, certainly inspired by God, urged the sailors not to risk continuing the voyage at such a dangerous time. But the pilot and the master of the ship, not paying attention to Paul's words, said that there was nothing to fear. They set sail with the intention of reaching another port on that island called Phoenix, hoping to spend the winter there more safely. But after a short distance, the ship was struck by a strong wind, and being unable to resist it, the sailors were forced to abandon themselves and the ship to the mercy of the waves. Arriving at Cauda, a small island not far from Crete, they realized they



were near a sandbank and, fearing to run the ship aground, they struggled to take another direction. But as the storm grew fiercer and the ship became more agitated, they found themselves in great danger. They threw the cargo overboard, then the ship's gear and armaments to lighten it. However, after several days, with neither sun nor stars appearing and the storm raging more fiercely, all hope of salvation seemed lost. To these troubles was added the fact that, either from seasickness in the storm or from the fear of death, no one thought of eating, which was harmful as the sailors lacked the strength to manage the ship. They regretted not having followed Paul's advice, but it was too late.

Paul, seeing the discouragement among the sailors and passengers, encouraged by his trust in God, comforted them, saying: "Brothers, you should have believed me and not set sail from Crete; thus we would have avoided this loss and this harm. However, take heart; believe me, for I assure you in the name of God that none of us will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. This night an angel of God appeared to me and said: 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must appear before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you the life of all those who sail with you.' Therefore, take heart, brothers, for I believe that it will be just as it was told to me."

Meanwhile, fourteen days had already passed since they had been suffering the storm, and everyone thought they would be swallowed up by the waves at any moment. It was midnight when, in the darkness, the sailors thought they were approaching land. To ascertain this, they took soundings and found the water to be twenty fathoms deep, then fifteen. Fearing they would end up against some rock, they dropped four anchors to hold the ship, waiting for daylight to see where they were.

At that moment, the sailors had the idea of fleeing the ship and trying to save themselves on the land that seemed near. Paul, always guided by divine light, turned to the centurion and the soldiers, saying: "Unless these men stay aboard, you cannot be saved, for God does not wish to be

tempted to perform miracles.” At these words, all were silent and followed Paul’s advice. At dawn, the holy Apostle looked at those who were on the ship and, seeing them all exhausted from their labours and famished from fasting, said to them: “Brothers, it is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting for improvement and have eaten nothing. Now I urge you not to let yourselves die of starvation. I have already assured you, and I assure you again, that not a hair of your head will perish. So take courage.” Having said this, Paul took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and in the presence of all, began to eat. Then all were encouraged and ate together with him; they were a total of 276 people.

But, as the fury of the winds and waves continued, they were forced to throw the wheat they had kept for their use overboard. When day broke, they thought they saw a bay and worked to drive the ship there to seek safety. But, driven by the force of the winds, the ship ran aground on a sandbank, beginning to break apart. Seeing the water entering through various cracks, the soldiers wanted to take the cruel course of killing all the prisoners, both to lighten the ship and because they feared they would escape after saving themselves by swimming.

But the centurion, who loved Paul and wanted to save him, did not approve of this plan; rather, he ordered that those who could swim should jump overboard to reach the land; the others were told to cling to boards or pieces of the ship; and so they all reached the shore safely.

## **CHAPTER XXIII. Saint Paul on the island of Malta – He is freed from the bite of a viper – He is welcomed in the house of Publius, whose father he heals – Year of Christ 60**

Neither Paul nor his companions knew the land on which they had landed after coming out of the waves. Informed

by the first inhabitants they encountered, they learned that the place was called Melita, now Malta, an island in the Mediterranean located between Africa and Sicily. Upon hearing of the large number of shipwrecked people who had come out of the waves like so many fish, the islanders rushed to them, and although they were barbarians, they were moved to see them so tired, exhausted, and trembling from the cold. To warm them, they lit a large fire.

Paul, always attentive to perform acts of charity, went to gather a bundle of dry branches. While he was putting them on the fire, a viper that was among them, numbed by the cold but awakened by the heat, jumped out and attached itself to Paul's hand. The barbarians, seeing the snake hanging from his hand, thought ill of him and said to one another: "This man must be a murderer or some great scoundrel; he has escaped from the sea, but divine vengeance strikes him on land." But how much we must guard against judging our neighbour rashly!

Paul, reviving the faith in Jesus Christ, who had assured his Apostles that neither snakes nor poisons would harm them, shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no harm. The good people were waiting for Paul to swell up and fall dead after a few moments, as happened to anyone unfortunate enough to be bitten by those animals. They waited a long time, and seeing that nothing happened to him, they changed their minds and said that Paul was a great god come down from heaven. Perhaps they believed he was Hercules, considered the god and protector of Malta. According to legends, Hercules, still a child, killed a serpent, hence called *ofiothoco*, meaning serpent-slayer.

God confirmed this first miracle with another even more astonishing and lasting: indeed, every poisonous power was taken away from the snakes of that island, so that from that time on, there was no longer any fear of the bite of vipers. What more? It is said that the very soil of the island of Malta, taken elsewhere, is a sure remedy against the bites of vipers and snakes.

The governor of the island, a prince named

Publius, a very wealthy man, upon hearing of the miraculous way in which those shipwrecked people had been saved from the waters and informed, or having been a witness, of the miracle of the viper, sent to invite Paul and his companions, who had arrived in a number of 276. He welcomed them into his house and honoured them for three days, providing them with lodging and food at his own expense. God did not leave Publius's generosity and courtesy without reward. He had his father in bed, afflicted with fever and severe dysentery that had brought him to the point of death. Paul went to see the sick man and, after speaking words of charity and comfort to him, began to pray. Then, rising up, he approached the bed, laid his hands on the sick man, who was immediately healed. Thus the good old man, free from all illness and fully restored, ran to embrace his son, blessing Paul and the God he preached. Publius, his father, and his family (as Saint John Chrysostom assures) filled with gratitude towards the great Apostle, were instructed in the faith and received baptism at the hands of Paul.

News of the miraculous healing of Publius's father spread, and all those who were sick or had sick people of any disease came or were brought to Paul's feet, and he, blessing them in the name of Jesus Christ, sent them all away healed, blessing God and believing in the Gospel. In a short time, the whole island received baptism, and, having torn down the temples of idols, they erected others dedicated to the worship of the true God.

## **CHAPTER XXIV. Saint Paul's journey from Malta to Syracuse – He preaches in Reggio – His arrival in Rome – Year of Christ 60**

The Maltese were full of enthusiasm for Paul and for the doctrine he preached, so much so that, in addition to embracing the faith en masse, they competed in providing him and his companions with everything they needed for the time

they stayed in Malta and for the journey to Rome. Paul stayed in Malta for three months, due to the winter when the sea is not navigable. It is commonly believed that during that time he guided Publius in Christian perfection and that, before leaving, he ordained him bishop of that island; which certainly was a great consolation for those faithful.

When spring came and the departure for Rome was decided, the centurion Julius arranged for a ship that was going from Alexandria to Italy and that had as its sign two gods called Castor and Pollux, whom the idolaters believed to be the protectors of navigation. To the great regret of the Maltese, they embarked for Sicily, a very nearby island to Italy, and favoured by the wind, they soon arrived in Syracuse, the main city of this island. Here the Gospel had already been preached by Saint Peter, who had ordained Saint Marcian as bishop there. This worthy pastor wanted to host the holy Apostle in his house and had him celebrate the holy mysteries in a cave, to the great joy of himself and those faithful. An ancient church, which still exists today in that city, is dedicated to our holy Apostle, and it is believed to have been built over the very cave where Saint Paul had preached the word of God and celebrated the divine mysteries.

Leaving Syracuse, they sailed along the island of Sicily, passed the port of Messina, and arrived with his companions in Reggio, a city and port of Calabria, very close to Sicily. Here they stayed for one day.

Accredited historians of that country recount many wonderful things performed by Saint Paul during that brief stop; among these, we choose the following fact. The Reggians, who were idolaters, having heard that a ship with the sign of Castor and Pollux, greatly honoured by them, had docked in their port, rushed in large numbers to see it. Paul wanted to take advantage of that gathering to preach Jesus Christ, but they did not want to listen to him. Then he, moved by faith in that Jesus who had performed so many wonders by his hand, took out a candle stub and said: "I beg you to let me speak at least for the time that this little piece of candle will take

to burn out." They accepted the condition with laughter and quieted down.

Paul placed the candle on a stone column set on the shore. Immediately the whole column caught fire and a great flame appeared, which served him as a burning torch. He had ample time to teach them, for those barbarians, astonished by such a miracle, listened to Paul meekly for as long as he wished to speak; and no one dared to disturb him. The faith was accepted, and on the site of the miracle, a magnificent church was erected to the true God. On the main altar, that column was placed, and to preserve the memory of that miracle, a solemnity with a proper office was established. In the Mass a prayer is read that translates as follows: "O God, who at the preaching of the Apostle Paul, miraculously causing a stone column to shine, deigned to instruct the peoples of Reggio with the light of faith, grant us, we pray, to be worthy to have in heaven as intercessor him whom we have had as a preacher of the Gospel on earth" (Cesar, Acts of the Apostles, vol. 2).

After that day, invited by favorable weather, Paul and his companions embarked for Pozzuoli, a city in Campania nine miles from Naples. Here he was greatly consoled by meeting several who had already embraced the faith, preached to them by Saint Peter a few years earlier.

Those good Christians also experienced great consolation and begged Paul to stay with them for seven days. Paul, having obtained permission from the centurion, stayed that time and, on a feast day, spoke to the large assembly of those faithful.

News of the arrival of the great Apostle in Italy had already reached Rome, and the faithful of that city, eager to meet in person the author of the famous letter from Corinth, came to meet him at the Forum of Appius, now called Fossa Nuova, which is a town about 50 miles from Rome. Continuing on their way, they arrived at the Three Taverns, a place about 30 miles from Rome, where he found many others who had come there to give him a joyful welcome.

Accompanied by that large number of faithful, who were not satisfied with admiring that great minister of Jesus Christ, he arrived in Rome as if led in triumph. Here the Christian faith, as has been said, had already been preached by Saint Peter, who had held the papal seat there for eighteen years.

## **CHAPTER XXV. Paul speaks to the Jews and preaches to them Jesus Christ – Progress of the Gospel in Rome – Year of Christ 61**

Upon arriving in Rome, Paul was delivered to the prefect of the praetorian guard, that is, to the general of the praetorian guards, so called because they had the special care of guarding the person of the emperor. The name of that illustrious Roman was Afranius Burrus, of whom history makes very honorable mention.

The centurion Julius took care to recommend Paul to that prefect, who treated him with singular kindness. The letters from governors Felix and Festus, which certainly must have made known Paul's innocence, and the good testimony given by centurion Julius, put him in good light and respect with Burrus, who gave him full freedom to live alone wherever he pleased, on the condition that he was watched by a soldier when he left the house. However, Paul always had a chain on his arm when he was at home; if he went out, the chain that bound his arm passed behind to keep him connected with the soldier who accompanied him, so that that soldier was always attached to Paul through the same chain. The holy Apostle rented a house, in which he took lodging with his companions, among whom are especially named Luke, Aristarchus, and Timothy, that faithful disciple of his from Lystra.

Three days after his arrival, he sent to invite the leading Jews who lived in Rome, asking them to come to him in his lodging. Gathering in good number, he spoke to them thus: "I would not want the state in which you see me and the

chains to which I am bound to put you in a bad opinion of me. God knows that I have done nothing against my people, nor against the customs and laws of my homeland. I was chained in Jerusalem and then delivered to the Romans. They examined me and, having found nothing in me that deserved punishment, wanted to send me back free; but the Jews strongly opposed, and I was forced to appeal to Caesar.

"This is the only reason I have been brought to Rome. I do not want to accuse my brothers here, but I wish to let you know the reason for my coming and, at the same time, to speak to you about the Messiah and the resurrection, which is precisely the reason for these chains. On this subject, I desire very much to be able to open my heart to you."

To these words, the Jews replied: "Indeed, we have not received letters from Judea, nor has anyone come to report anything against you. We are also very eager to know your thoughts, since we know that the sect of Christians is opposed throughout the world."

Paul gladly accepted the invitation and, assigning them a day, a large number of Jews gathered in his house. He then began to explain the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the divinity of his person, the necessity of faith in him, confirming everything with the words of the Prophets and of Moses. Such was the desire to listen and such the eagerness to preach that Paul's discourse lasted from morning until evening. Among the Jews who listened to him, many believed and embraced the faith, but several strongly opposed him.

The holy Apostle, seeing such stubbornness on the part of those who should have been the first to believe, said to them these harsh words: "Of this inflexible stubbornness that I see here among you in Rome, as I have found in all parts of the world, the fault is yours. This hardness of yours was already foretold by the prophet Isaiah, when he said: 'Go to this people and say: You will hear with your ears, but will not understand; you will see with your eyes, but will not comprehend anything; for the heart of this people has grown dull, they have closed their ears and shut their eyes.'



“Be assured,” Paul continued, “that the salvation you do not want, God will not give you; rather, he will bring it to the Gentiles, who will accept it.”

Paul’s words were almost useless for the Jews. They departed from him continuing the disputes and vain discussions about what they had heard, without opening their hearts to the grace that was being offered to them. Therefore, deeply saddened, Paul turned to the Gentiles, who with humility of heart came to listen to him and in large numbers embraced the faith.

The holy Apostle himself expresses the great consolation for the progress the Gospel was making during his imprisonment, writing to the faithful of Philippi: “When you, brothers, heard that I was being held prisoner in Rome, you felt sorrow, not so much for my person, but for the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, know that it is quite the opposite. My chains have become the honour of Jesus Christ and have served to make him better known not only to those of the city who came to me to be instructed in the faith, but also in the court and in the palace of the emperor himself. For this, you should rejoice with me and thank God.”

## **CHAPTER XXVI. St Luke – The Philippians send help to St Paul – Illness and healing of Epaphroditus – Letter to the Philippians – Conversion of Onesimus – Year of Jesus Christ 61**

What we have said so far about the actions of St Paul was almost literally taken from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke. This preacher of the Gospel continued to be a faithful companion of St. Paul; he preached the Gospel in Italy, Dalmatia, Macedonia, and ended his life with martyrdom in Patras, a city in Achaia. He was a physician, painter, and sculptor. There are many statues and paintings of the Blessed Virgin venerated in various countries

that are attributed to St. Luke. Let us return to St Paul.

Two facts are especially memorable in the life of this holy Apostle while he was imprisoned in Rome: one concerns the faithful of Philippi, the other the conversion of Onesimus.

Among the many peoples to whom the holy Apostle preached the Gospel, none showed him greater signs of affection than the Philippians. They had already provided him with abundant alms when he preached in their city, in Thessalonica, and in Corinth.

When they learned that Paul was imprisoned in Rome, they imagined that he was in need; therefore, they made a considerable collection and, in order to make it more dear and honourable, they sent it by the hand of St. Epaphroditus, their bishop.

This holy prelate, upon arriving in Rome, found Paul not only in need of financial help but also of personal assistance, as he was afflicted by a serious illness caused by imprisonment. Epaphroditus devoted himself to serving him with such diligence, charity, and fervour that, having become ill himself, he was at the point of death. But God wanted to reward the charity of the saint and ensure that no additional affliction was added to Paul's heart, and restored his health.

The Philippians, upon hearing that Epaphroditus was gravely ill, were plunged into the deepest dismay. Therefore, Paul deemed it good to send him back to Philippi with a letter, in which he explains the reason that led him to send back Epaphroditus, whom he calls his brother, co-worker, colleague, and their apostle. He then urges them to receive him with all joy and to honour every person of similar merit, who, imitating him, is ready to give his life for the service of Christ. He also tells the Philippians that he would soon send Timothy to bring him precise news of that community; he further states that he hoped to be set free and to see them once again.

Epaphroditus was received by the Philippians as an angel sent from the Lord, and Paul's letter filled the hearts

of those faithful with the greatest consolation.

The other fact that makes St. Paul's imprisonment famous was the conversion of Onesimus, a servant of Philemon, a wealthy citizen of Colossae, a city in Phrygia. This Philemon had been won to the faith by St. Paul and corresponded so well to the grace of the Lord that he was considered a model of Christians, and his house was called a church because it was always open for acts of piety and for the exercise of charity towards the poor. He had many slaves who served him, and among them was one named Onesimus. This one, having unfortunately given himself to vices, awaited the opportunity to flee, and stealing a large sum of money from his master, escaped to Rome. There, indulging in debauchery and other excesses, he squandered the stolen money and soon found himself in the greatest misery. By chance, he heard about St Paul, whom he may have seen and served in his master's house. The charity and kindness of the holy Apostle inspired him with confidence, and he decided to present himself to him. He went and threw himself at his feet, confessed his error and the unhappy state of his soul, and completely entrusted himself to him. Paul recognized a true prodigal son in that slave. He welcomed him kindly, as he did with everyone, and after making him aware of the seriousness of his fault and the unhappy state of his soul, he dedicated himself to instructing him in the faith. When he saw in him the necessary dispositions to become a good Christian, he baptized him in the same prison. The good Onesimus, after receiving the grace of baptism, remained full of gratitude and affection towards his father and teacher, and began to prove it by serving him loyally in the needs of his imprisonment. Paul wished to keep him with him, but did not want to do so without Philemon's permission. He therefore thought to send Onesimus himself back to his master. And since he did not dare to present himself to him, Paul wanted to accompany him with a letter, saying to him: "Take this letter and go to your master, and be assured that you will obtain more than you desire."

## CHAPTER XXVII. Letter of St Paul to Philemon – Year of Jesus Christ 62

The letter of St Paul to Philemon is the easiest and shortest of his letters, and since for the beauty of its sentiments it can serve as a model for any Christian, we offer it in full to the benevolent reader. It is as follows:

“Paul, a prisoner for the faith of Jesus Christ, and brother Timothy to our dear Philemon, our co-worker, to Apphia our very dear sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to all the faithful who gather in your house. God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ grant you grace and peace.

“Continuously remembering you in my prayers, O Philemon, I give thanks to my God hearing of your faith and your great charity towards all the faithful. I also thank God upon hearing of the liberality stemming from your faith, so manifest to the eyes of all, for the good works that are practised in your house for the love of Jesus Christ. We, O dearest brother, have been filled with joy and consolation knowing that the faithful have found such relief from your goodness. Therefore, although I may have full freedom in Christ to order you to do what is your duty, yet, in the name of the love I bear you, I would rather appeal to you, even though I am what I am in your regard, that is, even though I am Paul, already old and currently a prisoner for the faith of Jesus Christ.

“The prayer I make for you is for Onesimus, my son, whom I have begotten in my chains, who once was useless to you, but who is now very useful both to you and to me. I am sending him back to you and I ask you to receive him as my own heart. I would have liked to keep him with me, so that he might serve me on your behalf, in my chains for the sake of the Gospel; but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might be voluntary and not forced. Perhaps he was separated from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but as

a beloved brother. If then he is dear to me, how much more will he be to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

“So if you consider me as a partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it, not to mention that you owe me even your own self. Yes, brother, I expect to receive this joy from you in the Lord. Grant me this consolation in Christ! I write to you, confident in your obedience, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. I also ask you to prepare a guest room for me, for I hope that through your prayers, God will grant me to return to you.

“Epaphra, who is in prison with me for Christ Jesus, greets you along with Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

Epaphra, whom St Paul speaks of here, had been converted to the faith by him when he was preaching in Phrygia. Later becoming an apostle of his homeland, he was made bishop of Colossae. He went to Rome to visit St. Paul and was imprisoned with him. After being released, he returned to govern his Church in Colossae, where he ended his life with the crown of martyrdom.

Mark, who is mentioned here, is John Mark, who after working hard with St. Barnabas in preaching the Gospel, later joined St. Paul, thus repairing the weakness shown when he abandoned St. Paul and St. Barnabas to return home.

When Onesimus arrived in Colossae, he presented himself with the letter to his master who received him with the utmost affection, glad to have back not a slave, but a Christian. He granted him full forgiveness and, since he understood from the letter of the holy Apostle that Onesimus could render some service, he sent him back to him with a thousand greetings and blessings.

This servant proved to be truly faithful to the Christian vocation. St Paul, seeing him adorned with the virtues and the knowledge necessary to be a preacher of the

Gospel, ordained him a priest and later consecrated him bishop of Ephesus. He received the crown of martyrdom, and the Catholic Church commemorates him on February 16.

## **CHAPTER XXVIII. St. Paul writes to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and the Hebrews – Year of Christ 62**

The zeal of our Apostle was tireless, and since his chains kept him in Rome, he endeavoured to send his disciples or to write letters wherever he recognized the need. Among other things, he was informed that in Colossae, where Philemon lived, questions had arisen due to some false preachers who wanted to compel all Gentiles coming to the faith to be circumcised and to observe legal ceremonies. Furthermore, they had introduced a superstitious worship of angels. Paul, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, informed of these dangerous novelties, wrote a letter that should be read in its entirety to appreciate its beauty and the sublimity of its sentiments. However, the words concerning tradition deserve to be noted: "The things," he says, "that are most important to me will be verbally communicated to you by Tychicus and Onesimus, who are sent to you for this purpose." These words demonstrate how the Apostle had matters of great importance unwritten, but which he sent to be communicated verbally in the form of tradition.

One thing that caused no small anxiety to our Apostle was the news from Ephesus. When he was in Miletus and summoned the main pastors, he had told them that, due to the evils he had to endure, he believed they would not see his face again. This left those affectionate faithful in the utmost dismay. The holy Apostle, made aware of the sadness that troubled the Ephesians, wrote a letter to console them.

Among other things, he recommends considering Jesus Christ as the head of the Church and to remain united to him in the person of his Apostles. He strongly advises staying

away from certain sins that should not even be named among Christians: "Fornication," he says, "impurity, and greed must not even be named among you" (chapter 5, verse 5).

Then he speaks to the young people with these affectionate words: "Children, I commend you in the Lord, be obedient to your parents, for it is right. Honour your father and mother, says the Lord. If you observe this commandment, you will be happy and live long on the earth."

Then he speaks to the parents: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You, servants, obey your masters as you would Christ, not as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. You, masters, do the same to them, putting aside threats, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that with him there is no favouritism."

This letter was brought to Ephesus by Tychicus, that faithful disciple who, along with Onesimus, had delivered the letter written to the Colossians.

From Rome, he also wrote his letter to the Hebrews, that is, to the Jews of Palestine who had converted to the faith. His purpose was to console them and to warn them against the seductions of some other Jews. He demonstrates how the sacrifices, prophecies, and the old law have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and that to him alone honor and glory should be given for all ages. He insists that they remain constantly united to the Saviour in faith, without which no one can please God; but he emphasizes that this faith does not justify without works.

## **CHAPTER XXIX. Saint Paul is freed – Martyrdom of Saint James the Less – Year of Christ 63**

Four years had already passed since the holy Apostle had been held prisoner: two he had spent in Caesarea

and two in Rome. Nero had brought him before his tribunal and had recognized his innocence; but, whether out of hatred for the Christian religion or due to the indifference of that cruel emperor, he continued to send Paul back to prison. Finally, he resolved to grant him full freedom. This decision is commonly attributed to the great remorse that the tyrant felt for the heinous acts he had committed. He had even gone so far as to have his mother assassinated. After such misdeeds, he felt the sharpest remorse, for men, no matter how wicked, cannot help but feel the torments of conscience within themselves.

Nero, therefore, to somehow appease his soul, thought to perform some good deeds and, among others, to grant freedom to Paul. Thus, having become master of himself, the great Apostle used his freedom to bring the light of the Gospel with greater fervour to other more distant nations.

Perhaps someone will wonder what the Jews of Jerusalem did when they saw Paul taken from their hands. I will say it briefly. They directed all their fury against Saint James, called the Less, bishop of that city. The governor Festus had died; his successor had not yet taken office. The Jews took advantage of that opportunity to present themselves en masse to the high priest, named Ananus, son of that Annas and brother-in-law of Caiaphas, who had condemned the Saviour.

Determined to have him condemned, they greatly feared the people who loved him like a tender father and reflected in his virtues; he was called the Just by all. History tells us that he prayed with such assiduity that the skin of his knees had become like that of a camel. He drank neither wine nor other intoxicating liquors; he was extremely strict in fasting, frugal in eating, drinking, and dressing. He donated everything superfluous to the poor.

Despite these beautiful qualities, the obstinate ones found a way to give the sentence at least an appearance of justice with a cunning worthy of them. In agreement with the high priest, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Scribes



organized a riot and ran to James, saying amidst a thousand shouts: "You must immediately correct this countless people, who believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Since you are called the Just, everyone believes in you; therefore, go up to the top of this temple, so that everyone can see and hear you, and bear witness to the truth."

They led him to a high balcony outside the temple, and when they saw him up there, they exclaimed feigning: "O just man, tell us what we should believe about Jesus crucified." The place could not have been more solemn. Either renounce the faith, or, by uttering a word in favour of Jesus Christ, be immediately put to death. But the zeal of the holy Apostle knew how to take full advantage of that occasion.

"And why," he exclaimed loudly, "why do you question me about Jesus, Son of Man and at the same time Son of God? In vain do you pretend to doubt my faith in this true Redeemer. I declare before you that he is in heaven, seated at the right hand of Almighty God, from where he will come to judge the whole world." Many believed in Jesus Christ and, in the simplicity of their hearts, began to exclaim: "Glory to the Son of David."

The Jews, disappointed in their expectations, furiously shouted: "He has blasphemed! Let him be immediately thrown down and put to death." They rushed up and pushed him down onto the pavement.

He did not die instantly and, managing to rise again, knelt down and, following the example of the Saviour, invoked divine mercy upon his enemies, saying: "Forgive them, Lord, for they do not know what they do."

Then the furious enemies, instigated by the pontiff, hurled a rain of stones at him until one, striking him on the head with a club, laid him dead. Many faithful were slaughtered along with this Apostle, always for the same cause, namely out of hatred for Christianity (cf. Eusebius, *Church History*).

## **CHAPTER XXX. Other journeys of Saint Paul – He writes to Timothy and Titus – His return to Rome – Year of Christ 68**

Freed from the chains of prison, Saint Paul set out for those places where he intended to go. He went to Judea to visit the Jews, but he stayed there little, because those obstinate ones were already rekindling the primitive persecution. He went to Colossae, according to the promise made to Philemon. He went to Crete, where he preached the Gospel and where he ordained Titus bishop of that island. He returned to Asia to visit the Churches of Troas, Iconium, Lystra, Miletus, Corinth, Nicopolis, and Philippi. From this city, he wrote a letter to his Timothy, whom he had ordained bishop of Ephesus.

In this letter, the Apostle gives him various rules for the consecration of bishops and priests and for the exercise of many things concerning ecclesiastical discipline. Almost at the same time, he wrote a letter to Titus, bishop of Crete, giving him almost the same advice given to Timothy and inviting him to come soon to see him.

It is commonly believed that he went to preach in Spain and in many other places. He spent five years in missions and apostolic labours. But the specific events of these journeys, the conversions made under his care in various countries, are not known to us. We can only say with Saint Anselm that “the holy Apostle ran from the Red Sea to the Ocean, bringing everywhere the light of truth. He was like the sun that illuminates the whole world from East to West, so that it was more the world and the peoples that were lacking to Paul than Paul lacking to any of the men. This is the measure of his zeal and his charity.”

While Paul was occupied in the labours of the apostolate, he learned that a fierce persecution had broken out in Rome under the empire of Nero. Paul immediately imagined the great need to support the faith in such occasions

and took the road to Rome without delay.

Upon arriving in Italy, he found everywhere the edicts of Nero against the faithful published. He heard of the crimes and calumnies attributed to them; everywhere he saw crosses, pyres, and other kinds of tortures prepared for the confessors of the faith, and this doubled in Paul the desire to soon be among those faithful. As soon as he arrived, like one who offers himself to God, he began to preach in the public squares, in the synagogues, both to Gentiles and to Jews. To the latter, who had almost always shown themselves obstinate, he preached the imminent fulfilment of the prophecies of the Saviour, which foretold the destruction of the city and the temple of Jerusalem with the dispersion of that whole nation. He suggested, however, a means to avoid divine scourges: to convert from the heart and to recognize their Saviour in Jesus whom they had crucified.

To the Gentiles, he preached the goodness and mercy of God, who invited them to repentance; therefore, he urged them to abandon sin, to mortify passions, and to embrace the Gospel. To such preaching, confirmed by continuous miracles, the listeners came in crowds to ask for baptism. Thus, the Church, persecuted with iron, fire, and a thousand terrors, appeared more beautiful and flourishing and increased every day the number of its elect.

What more can be said? Saint Paul pushed his zeal and charity so far that he managed to win over a certain Proclus, steward of the imperial palace, and the very wife of the emperor. They embraced the faith with fervour and died as martyrs.

## **CHAPTER XXXI. Saint Paul is imprisoned again – He writes the second letter to Timothy – His martyrdom – Year of Christ 69-70**

Saint Paul had also come to Rome with Saint Peter,

who had held the seat of Christianity there for 25 years. He had also gone elsewhere to preach the faith, and, when he was informed of the persecution raised against Christians, he immediately returned to Rome. The two princes of the Apostles worked together until Nero, irritated by the conversions that had taken place in his court and even more by the disgraceful death of the magician Simon (as told in the life of Saint Peter), ordered that Saint Peter and Saint Paul be sought with the utmost rigour and brought to the Mamertine prison, at the foot of the Capitol hill. Nero intended to have the two Apostles executed immediately, but he was deterred by political affairs and a conspiracy plotted against him. Furthermore, he had decided to glorify his name by cutting the isthmus of Corinth, a strip of land about nine miles wide. This undertaking could not be realized, but it left a year for Paul to win more souls for Jesus Christ.

He managed to convert many prisoners, some guards, and other notable figures, who, out of a desire to be instructed or out of curiosity, went to listen to him, since Saint Paul during his imprisonment could be freely visited and wrote letters where he saw the need. It was from the prison in Rome that he wrote the second letter to Timothy.

In this letter, the Apostle announces his death is near, expresses a strong desire for Timothy to come to him to assist him, as he was almost abandoned by all. This letter can be called the testament of Saint Paul; and, among many things, it also provides one of the greatest proofs in favour of tradition. "What you have heard from me," he tells him, "be sure to pass on to faithful men who will be able to teach it to others after you." From these words we learn that in addition to the written doctrine, there are other truths no less useful and certain that must be transmitted orally, in the form of tradition, with an unbroken succession for all future times.

He then gives many useful pieces of advice to Timothy for the discipline of the Church, to recognize various heresies that were spreading among Christians. And, to

mitigate the wound that the news of his imminent death would cause him, he encourages him thus: "Do not be saddened for me; rather, if you love me, rejoice in the Lord. I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, when, having offered my life as a sacrifice, I will present myself to him. That crown will not be awarded to me only, but to all who, with good works, prepare to receive it at his coming."

Paul had comfort in his prison from a certain Onesiphorus. This man, having come to Rome and learned that Paul, his former teacher and father in Jesus Christ, was in prison, went to visit him and offered to serve him. The Apostle felt great consolation for such tender charity and, writing to Timothy, he praises him greatly and prays to God for him.

"May God," he writes to him, "have mercy on the family of Onesiphorus, who often comforted me and was not ashamed of my chains; on the contrary, having come to Rome, he sought me diligently and found me. May the Lord grant him to find mercy with him on that day. And you know well how many services he rendered to me in Ephesus."

Meanwhile, Nero returned from Corinth all irritated because the undertaking of the isthmus had failed. He became even more enraged in persecuting Christians; and his first act was to carry out the death sentence against Saint Paul. First, he was beaten with rods, and the column to which he was tied when he underwent that flogging is still shown in Rome. It is true that with it he lost the privilege of Roman citizenship, but he gained the right of a citizen of heaven; therefore, he felt the greatest joy in seeing himself likened to his divine Master. This flogging was the prelude to his later beheading.

Paul was condemned to death because he had insulted the gods; for this sole reason, it was permitted to cut off the head of a Roman citizen. What a beautiful crime!

To be considered impious because, instead of worshiping stones and demons, one wishes to worship the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ. God had already revealed to him the day and hour of his death; therefore, he felt a joy that was already entirely heavenly. "I desire," he exclaimed, "to be freed from this body to be with Christ." Finally, from a band of henchmen, he was taken from prison and led outside of Rome through the gate called Ostiense, making him walk towards a marsh along the Tiber, they arrived at a place called Acque Salvie, about three miles from Rome.

It is said that a matron, named Plautilla, the wife of a Roman senator, seeing the holy Apostle in a poor state and led to death, began to weep bitterly. Saint Paul consoled her, saying: "Do not weep; I will leave you a memory of me that will be very dear to you. Give me your veil." She gave it to him. With this veil, the holy man's eyes were bandaged before being beheaded. And, at the order of the saint, it was returned bloodied to Plautilla by a pious person, who kept it as a relic.

When Paul arrived at the place of execution, he knelt down and, with his face turned to heaven, commended his soul and the Church to God; then he bowed his head and received the stroke of the sword that severed his head from his body. His soul flew to meet that Jesus whom he had longed to see.

The angels welcomed him and introduced him with immense joy to participate in the happiness of heaven. It is certain that the first to whom he had to give thanks was Saint Stephen, to whom, after Jesus, he owed his conversion and his salvation.

## **CHAPTER XXXII. Burial of Saint Paul – Wonders performed at his tomb – Basilica dedicated to him**

The day Saint Paul was executed outside of Rome,

at the Salvia Waters, was the same day Saint Peter received the palm of martyrdom at the foot of Vatican Hill, on June 29, when Saint Paul was 65 years old. Baronius, who is called the father of ecclesiastical history, recounts how Saint Paul's head, as soon as it was severed from his body, gushed milk instead of blood. Two soldiers, upon witnessing such a miracle, converted to Jesus Christ. His head then, falling to the ground, made three jumps, and where it touched the ground, three springs of living water gushed forth. To preserve the memory of this glorious event, a church was erected whose walls enclose these fountains, which are still called the Fountains of Saint Paul (cf. F. Baronius, year 69-70).

Many travellers (cf. Cesari and Tillemont) went to the site to witness this fact and assure us that those three springs they saw and tasted have a flavour like milk. In those early times, the Christians were very diligent in gathering and burying the bodies of those who gave their lives for the faith. Two women, one named Basilissa and the other Anastasia, devised a way and time to recover the body of the holy Apostle and, at night, buried him two miles away from the place where he had suffered martyrdom, a mile from Rome. Nero, through his spies, learned of the work of those pious women, and that was enough for him to have them killed, severing their hands, feet, and then their heads.

Although the Gentiles knew that Paul's body had been buried by the faithful, they could never know the exact location. This was known only to the Christians, who kept it secret as their most precious treasure and honoured it in the greatest possible way. But the esteem that the faithful had for those relics reached such a point that some merchants from the East, coming to Rome, attempted to steal them and take them to their country. They secretly exhumed it in the catacombs, two miles from Rome, waiting for the opportune moment to transport it. But at the moment of carrying out their plan, a horrible storm arose with flashes and terrible lightning, forcing them to abandon the enterprise. Once the matter became known, the Christians of Rome went to retrieve

Paul's body and brought it back to its original place along the Ostian Way.

At the time of Constantine the Great, a magnificent basilica was built in honour of and over the tomb of our Apostle. At all times, kings and emperors, forgetful of their greatness, filled with fear and reverence, went to that tomb to kiss the coffin that holds the bones of the holy Apostle.

The Roman Pontiffs themselves did not approach, nor do they approach, the place of his burial unless filled with reverence, and they have never allowed anyone to take a particle of those venerable bones. Various princes and kings made live requests for them, but no Pope deemed it possible to satisfy them. This great reverence was greatly increased by the continuous miracles that were performed at that tomb. Saint Gregory the Great reports many of them and assures that no one entered that temple to pray without trembling. Those who dared to profane it or attempted to remove even a small particle were punished by God with manifest vengeance.

Gregory XI was the first who, in a public calamity, almost compelled by the prayers and pleas of the people of Rome, took the head of the Saint, lifted it high, showed it to the multitude that wept with tenderness and devotion, and immediately returned it to where he had taken it.

Now, the head of this great Apostle is in the church of St John Lateran; the rest of the body has always been preserved in the basilica of Saint Paul outside the walls, along the Ostian Way, a mile from Rome.

Even his chains became an object of devotion among the Christian faithful. Through contact with those glorious irons, many miracles were performed, and the greatest figures in the world always considered it a precious relic to have a bit of filings from them.



## CHAPTER XXXIII. Portrait of Saint Paul – Image of his spirit – Conclusion

In order to better imprint the devotion towards this prince of the Apostles, it is useful to give an idea of his physical appearance and his spirit.

Paul did not have a very handsome appearance, as he himself states. He was of short stature, with a strong and robust build, and he proved this with the long and heavy labours he endured in his career, having never been ill, except for the ailments caused by chains and imprisonment. Only towards the end of his days did he walk a bit bent. He had a fair face, a small head, and almost completely bald, which denoted a sanguine and fiery character. He had a broad forehead, low black eyebrows, a hooked nose, and a long, thick beard. But his eyes were extremely lively and bright, with a sweet expression that tempered the intensity of his gaze. This is the portrait of his physical appearance.

But what about his spirit? We know it from his own writings. He had a sharp and sublime intellect, a noble soul, and a generous heart. Such was his courage and firmness that he drew strength and vigour from the very difficulties and dangers. He was very knowledgeable in the science of the Jewish religion. He was deeply learned in the Sacred Scriptures, and this knowledge, aided by the light of the Holy Spirit and the charity of Jesus Christ, made him the great Apostle who was nicknamed the Doctor of the Gentiles. Saint John Chrysostom, a devoted admirer of our saint, greatly desired to see Saint Paul from the pulpit, for he said that the greatest orators of antiquity would seem languid and cold in comparison to him. There is no need to say more about his virtues, as what we have so far presented is nothing but a tapestry of the heroic virtues that he made shine in every place, at all times, and with every kind of people.

To conclude what has been said about this great saint, it is worth noting a virtue that he made shine above

all others: charity towards others and love for God. He challenged all creatures to separate him from the love of his divine Master. "Who will separate me," he exclaimed, "from the love of Jesus Christ? Perhaps tribulations or distress, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or persecution? No, certainly not. I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor future, nor any creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is the character of the true Christian: to be willing to lose everything, to suffer everything, rather than say or do the slightest thing contrary to the love of God.

Saint Paul spent more than thirty years of his life as an enemy of Jesus Christ; but as soon as he was illuminated by his heavenly grace, he gave himself entirely to him, and never separated from him again. He then spent over thirty-six years in the most austere penances, in the hardest labors, to glorify that Jesus whom he had persecuted.

Christian reader, perhaps you who read and I who write have spent part of our lives in offence to the Lord! But let us not lose heart: there is still time for us; God's mercy awaits us.

But let us not postpone our conversion, for if we wait until tomorrow to set things right for our souls, we run the grave risk of having no more time. Saint Paul laboured thirty-six years in the service of the Lord; now for 1800 years he enjoys the immense glory of heaven and will enjoy it for all ages. The same happiness is prepared for us, provided we give ourselves to God while we have time and persevere in holy service until the end. What is suffered in this world is nothing, but what we will enjoy in the next is eternal. Thus assures us Saint Paul himself.

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