

29. June 2023

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul Completing the Race

2 Tim 4:6-8.17-18

'As for me, my life is already being poured away as a libation, and the time has come for me to depart. I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith; all there is to come for me now is the crown of uprightness which the Lord, the upright judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me but to all those who have longed for his appearing. But the Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed for all the gentiles to hear; and so I was saved from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from all evil attempts on me, and bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'

Some exegete might ask how it is that in this text St. Paul speaks with such certainty of his own salvation. Perhaps someone would point out that it would be difficult for a “mortal” to speak in this way without falling into presumption...

Nevertheless, St. Paul was so intensely attached to the Lord and so devoted to the mission He had given him that he had no doubts about the goal to which this way he had travelled would lead him.

The moment of his departure was imminent... He had longed for death before, to be definitively with Christ, but he knew that it was better to stay, for his presence on earth was still necessary for the nascent communities (cf. Phil 1:23-25).

Now the time had finally come! Blessed is he who can exclaim with him at the end of his life: *“I have fought the good fight to the end; I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith”*.

Certainly St. Paul was aware that the Christian's life is a daily struggle; a struggle against the powers and dominations, against the evil spirits in the air (cf. Eph 6:12). God allows this struggle, so that the Church may complete the mission of Jesus in the world. These powers that were precipitated from heaven want to snatch salvation from men and make them part of the rebellion against God, thus establishing dominion for themselves (cf. Rev 12:17). *“The devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). But God gives us the necessary

armour to be able to resist (cf. Eph 6:13-17). Thus, spiritual combat proves our faith and increases and strengthens it.

St. Paul also had to face this “good fight” against the temptations of the world and those that come from our fallen nature.

How great was the mission entrusted to Paul: *“The Lord stood by me and gave me power, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed for all the gentiles to hear”*. He tirelessly proclaimed the gospel until the end of his life, and crowned his work with his martyrdom in Rome.

Now, the words we read today in the Letter to Timothy are not only a wonderful testimony to the life of the Apostle Paul, but also an invitation for us too to recognise and complete the mission that has been entrusted to us in our lives. Although not every person is called to do a work of the same dimensions as that of a St. Paul or a St. Peter, there is one thing that every person can do: his or her own mission. If someone asks God what this personal mission of his is and, having been shown it by God, makes a sincere effort to fulfil it, then perhaps he can also say at the end of his life: “I have reached the finish line in the race”. From this perspective, life is not simply a series of coincidences; everything has a profound meaning in order to fulfil the mission entrusted to him by God.

St. Paul knew how to remain faithful to his Lord and to his mission, even in the many struggles and hardships he went through, of which he gives us an insight in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Kor 11:18.21-30).

The example of his life and the words we hear today invite us to follow the truth, to serve the mission entrusted to us, to remain faithful to the Lord and to his Church, and thus to complete our career.