

PAPAL MASS ON THE
SOLEMNITY OF THE HOLY APOSTLES PETER AND PAUL

**HOLY MASS FOR THE IMPOSITION OF THE SACRED PALLIUM
ON METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOPS**

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Vatican Basilica
Tuesday, 29 June 2010

(Video)

(Booklet for the Celebration: 1, 2, 3)
Images of the celebration

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In their great wealth, the biblical texts of this Eucharistic Liturgy on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul highlight a theme that could be summed up in these words: God is close to his faithful servants and delivers them from all evil and delivers the Church from negative powers. It is the theme of the Church's freedom, that presents an historical aspect and another that is more profoundly spiritual.

This theme runs through the whole of today's Liturgy of the Word. The First and Second Readings speak respectively of St Peter and St Paul, stressing God's liberating action in their regard.

The text of the Acts of the Apostles especially describes with an abundance of detail the intervention of the Angel of the Lord who sets Peter free from his chains and leads him out of the prison of Jerusalem in which Herod the King had had him locked up and placed under strict surveillance (cf. Acts 12:1-11). Paul, on the other hand, in writing to Timothy when he felt he was approaching the end of his earthly life, makes a concise summary of it from which emerges the fact that the Lord has always been close to him, has delivered him from many dangers and will free him again, introducing him into his eternal Kingdom (cf. 2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18). The theme is reinforced by the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 34[33]), and is also given a special development in the Gospel passage of Peter's profession where Christ promises that the powers of death shall not prevail over the Church (cf. Mt 16:18).

A close look at this theme reveals a certain progression. In the First Reading a specific episode is recounted that shows the Lord's intervention to release Peter from prison. In the Second Reading Paul, on the basis of his extraordinary apostolic experience, says that he is convinced that the Lord, who has already rescued him "from the lion's mouth", will rescue him "from every evil", opening the gates of Heaven to him; on the other hand, in the Gospel nothing further is said of the individual Apostles but it speaks rather of the Church as a whole and of her indemnity from the forces of evil, meant in the full and profound sense. Thus we see that Jesus' promise "the powers of death shall not prevail against" the Church does indeed include the historical experiences of persecution that Peter and Paul and other Gospel witnesses suffered, but goes beyond them, with the intention of assuring protection,

especially from threats of a spiritual kind; in accordance with what Paul himself writes in his Letter to the Ephesians: "for we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present world of darkness, against the evil spirits in the heavens" (cf. Eph 6:12).

Indeed if we think of the two millenniums of the Church's history, we may note as the Lord Jesus had foretold (cf. Mt 10:16-33) that trials for Christians have never been lacking and in certain periods and places have assumed the character of true and proper persecution. Yet, despite the suffering they cause, they do not constitute the gravest danger for the Church. Indeed she is subjected to the greatest danger by what pollutes the faith and Christian life of her members and communities, corroding the integrity of the Mystical Body, weakening her capacity for prophecy and witness, and marring the beauty of her face. The Pauline Letters already testified to this reality. The First Letter to the Corinthians, for example, responds precisely to certain problems of division, inconsistency and infidelity to the Gospel that seriously threaten the Church. However, the Second Letter to Timothy a passage to which we listened also speaks of the perils of the "last days", identifying them with negative attitudes that belong to the world and can contaminate the Christian community: selfishness, vanity, pride, the attachment to money, etc. (cf. 3:1-5). The Apostle's conclusion is reassuring: men who do evil, he writes, "will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all" (3:9). Therefore a guarantee exists of the freedom that God assures the Church, freedom both from material ties that seek to prevent or to coerce her mission and from spiritual and moral evils that can tarnish her authenticity and credibility.

The subject of the Church's freedom, which Christ guaranteed to Peter, is also specifically relevant to the rite of the conferral of the Pallium, which today we renew for [38 Metropolitan Archbishops](#), to whom I address my most cordial greeting, which I extend with affection to all who have wished to accompany them on this pilgrimage. Communion with Peter and with his Successors is in fact a guarantee of freedom for the Church's Pastors and for the Communities entrusted to them. It has been highlighted at both levels in the previous reflections. At the historical level, union with the Apostolic See guarantees the particular Churches and the Bishops' Conferences freedom from local, national or supranational powers that in some cases can hinder the Church's mission. In addition, and more essentially, the Petrine ministry is a guarantee of freedom in the sense of full adherence to the truth, to the authentic tradition, so that the People of God may be preserved from errors concerning faith and morals. Therefore the fact that [new Metropolitans](#) come to Rome every year to receive the Pallium from the Pope's hands as a gesture of communion should be understood in its true sense, and the subject of the Church's freedom gives us a particularly important key to its interpretation. This appears obvious in the case of Churches marked by persecution or subjected to political interference or other harsh trials. However, this is equally important in the case of Communities that suffer the influence of misleading doctrines or ideological trends and practices contrary to the Gospel. In this sense, therefore, the Pallium becomes a pledge of freedom, comparable to the "yoke" of Jesus which he invites each person to take upon his or her shoulders (cf. Mt 11:29-30). Just as Christ's commandment although exacting is "easy and light" and, instead of weighing on those who carry it uplifts them, so the bond with the Apostolic See although demanding sustains the Pastor and the portion of the Church entrusted to his care, making them freer and stronger.

I would like to draw one last instruction from the word of God, and in particular from Christ's promise that the powers of death will not prevail over his Church. These words can also have an ecumenical meaning since, as I mentioned just now, one of the typical effects of the action

of the Evil One is, precisely, the internal division of the ecclesial Community. Ruptures are in fact symptoms of the power of sin that continues to act in members of the Church even after the redemption. However, Christ's word is clear: "*Non praevalerunt* they shall not prevail" (Mt 16:18). The unity of the Church is rooted in her union with Christ and the cause of full Christian unity that must ever be sought and renewed, from generation to generation is also sustained by his prayer and his promise. In the struggle against the spirit of evil, God gave us in Jesus, the "Advocate" defender, and after his Pasch, "another Counsellor" (cf. Jn 14:16), the Holy Spirit, who stays with us always and leads the Church towards the fullness of the truth (cf. Jn 14:16; 16:13) that is also the fullness of love and of unity. With these sentiments of trusting hope, I am glad to greet the Delegation of the Patriarchate of Constantinople which, in accordance with the beautiful custom of reciprocal visits, is taking part in the celebrations for the Holy Patrons of Rome. Let us thank God together for the progress in ecumenical relations between Catholic and Orthodox, and let us renew our commitment to respond generously to God's grace that is leading us to full communion.

Dear friends, I cordially greet each one of you, Your Eminences, my Brothers in the Episcopate, the Ambassadors and the Civil Authorities and, in particular, the Mayor of Rome, the priests, religious and lay faithful. Thank you for coming. May the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul obtain that you increase in love for the Holy Church, Mystical Body of Christ and Messenger of Unity and Peace for all mankind. May they also obtain that you joyfully offer for her holiness and her missionary efforts your endeavours and suffering, borne out of faithfulness to the Gospel. May the Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles and Mother of the Church always watch over you and in particular over the ministry of the Metropolitan Archbishops. With her heavenly help may you always live and act in that freedom which Christ won for us. Amen.