

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

Second Reading 2 Timothy 4: 6–8, 17–18

The letters to Timothy and to Titus are called ‘Pastoral letters’. Though they are the only ones addressed to an individual in charge of a local church, they are clearly meant for the whole community.

This letter is either written by Paul through a secretary, or – more likely – written by a disciple of Paul. However, uncertainty about the authorship should not ‘obscure the power of this letter read simply as it is presented. It is an eloquently passionate appeal of the greatest Christian apostle that his work continue beyond his death through generations of disciples’ (Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (1997)).

Timothy was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish Christian mother, a native of Lystra, in central Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

Today’s passage occurs at the end of the letter. Paul is in prison living his final days and reflecting on his life. His friends have deserted him and apart from moral isolation, it also means a lack of everyday comforts in prison – good food and proper bedding.

The author of the letter uses a series of images to describe Paul’s situation:

Life poured away as a drink offering: this is an image of sacrifice. Liquid – wine, oil, or in this case, blood – was poured out during a sacrificial rite.

I have run the race: here the image focuses not on winning but on running, and so provides a model for discipleship.

The crown of righteousness: an image belonging to an athletic contest where a crown of laurel leaves was given to the winner.

Paul has absolute trust in the Lord and is awaiting in hope for ‘*that Day*’ – that is the day of the second coming, and the Lord’s Appearing. Against all odds, he trust in the Lord’s support, quoting a line from Psalm 21 (22), v. 21: *I was rescued from the lion’s mouth*.

Bartolomeo Manfredi c.1620



The Feast of St Peter and St Paul

The tradition of celebrating the solemnities of both Saint Peter and Saint Paul on the same day (29 June) is of ancient origin. Together, the two saints are the founders of the See of Rome, through their preaching, ministry and martyrdom there.

Gospel Matthew 16: 13–19

The story takes place in Caesarea Philippi, a town 20 miles north of the Sea of Galilee, near the sources of the Jordan, at the base of what we now know as the Golan Heights. The population was entirely Gentile.

The beginning of the text is very similar to Luke’s account, though the last two verses have no parallel in the Gospels of Mark or Luke.

‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’

Here Matthew also includes the prophet Jeremiah: like Jesus, he also opposed the religious establishment of his time and suffered because of it.

‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’

Matthew alone adds ‘the Son of the living God’ and it is possible that in doing so he reflects the understanding that the early Church had of Jesus as Messiah.

‘You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church’

Jesus renames Simon to Peter from *petros*, the masculine Greek word for rock. It was not used as the name of a person at the time. *Petra*, its feminine form, also translated as ‘rock’, is a large, immovable rock.

In spite of Peter’s shortcomings, Jesus acknowledges his faith and his role as the leader and spokesperson for the disciples.

The keys of the kingdom – binding and loosing

The keys are the symbols of Peter’s authority, possibly a reference to Isaiah 22: 22.

To bind and to loose were rabbinical terms. Rabbis had the authority to declare what is permitted (bound) and what is not (loosed). Jesus gives that same authority to the leaders of the early Church.

