

STS. PETER AND PAUL, 2025

The Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, June 29, is important enough to the Church that it is celebrated even when June 29 falls on a Sunday, which is not the case with most feasts of saints. Sts. Peter and Paul, in Acts of the Apostles and in their own epistles, are representatives and examples of the Christian Ministry. It seems fitting on their feast day to preach on the Christian Ministry.

Christian Ministers have a unique dignity. Christian Ministers officially represent Jesus Christ. As an ambassador of the United States is officially appointed to represent our country, so a Christian Minister is officially appointed to represent the Lord Jesus Christ. Moses was a lawgiver, Aaron was a priest, Samuel was a Judge, and David was a king. Far beyond these figures, mere foreshadowings, or "types", of the One Who was to Come, Jesus Christ is at once the Lawgiver of Love, the Eternal High Priest, the Judge of the Living and the Dead, and the King of Kings. As the officially appointed representative of the Lawgiver of Love, the Eternal High Priest, the Judge of the Living and the Dead, and the King of Kings, Christian Ministers possess an extraordinary dignity.

The first Christian Ministers were the Apostles chosen by Jesus Christ personally. Later Christian Ministers have been chosen by Jesus Christ's Church. From the Apostles down to today's Christian Ministers, being officially appointed to Christian Ministry, either by the Lord Jesus personally or by the Church's Ordination, gives the awesome authority to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus Himself, as St. Paul puts it, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God begs you through us; we beseech you as Christ's representatives, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Today's Christian Ministers are not the same as the Apostles, of course. The Apostles were personally chosen by Jesus Christ, while today's Christian are ordained by Jesus Christ's Church. The Apostles were the founders of the Church. Today's Christian Ministers are continuers of Christ's Church. That said, the essential work of the Apostles is still the work of Christian Ministers. The Apostles taught the Faith and Way of Life that come from Christ, and so do today's Christian Ministers. As we see in the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostles governed the Christian community. Today's Christian Ministers govern the Christian community. As with the first Christians, so with today's Christians, there are sins that need to be forgiven. The tremendous authority that Jesus gave the Apostles, "Receive the Holy Spirit, whose sins you remit are remitted, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:23) has been passed down to today's Christian Ministry (though those ordained to Christian ministry share in this authority in different degrees).

Those Christians who are not ordained to official Christian Ministry are still given spiritual gifts for service to God's people. St Paul speaks of tongues and visions, of prophecies and of wonders, and there are many other spiritual gifts distributed among God's people. Only to those ordained to Christian Ministry, however, are given those gifts that pertain to representing the Lord Jesus Christ officially. This is true of the awesome power of remitting sins. "Whose sins you remit are remitted, and whose sins you retain are retained." In the Sacrament of Penance I dare to say "I absolve you from your sins . . ." Truly, it is only Jesus Christ who absolves from sin. Trembling, I speak only as His representative, but nonetheless as His officially appointed and spiritually empowered representative. I say those words of Absolution with both trembling and confidence.

The Apostles were the first Christian Ministers, and St. Peter was chosen by the Lord Jesus to be the leader of the Apostles. What the Lord Jesus says uniquely to St Peter, He says to all Christian Ministers, of whom Peter is the earthly head. You heard the Lord's powerful words: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in Heaven. And therefore I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it And I will give unto you the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." (Matthew 16:17-19) Though Peter's position is unique, these words are not spoken only to exalt the one man Simon Peter. These words are spoken to found the Christian Ministry, which will be continued in the Church of Jesus Christ until He comes again in Glory.

In different degrees, all those ordained to Christian Ministry possess the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; that is to say, all Christian Ministers, in different degrees, are given the public authority and spiritual power to celebrate the Holy Sacraments, acting officially and efficaciously in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Whom they represent. Those ordained to Christian Ministry are ordained to the three essential ranks of Deacon, Priest, and Bishop (there are, of course, gradations within those ranks, the Pope being the top ranking bishop, but those three basic ranks are the essential degrees of the Christian Ministry). Deacons have the power and authority to Baptize in ordinary circumstances (anyone can baptize in extraordinary circumstances), thereby giving, in Christ's name and in His Person, rebirth unto Eternal Life. Priests have the power to celebrate the Lord's Supper, acting in Christ's name and in His Person to feed the Christian People with the Food of Eternal Life, the Lord Jesus' very Body and Blood, under the sacramental forms of bread and wine. Bishops have the power to lay on hands to ordain men into the Christian Ministry, acting in Jesus Christ's name and in His Person to make men His official and sacramentally efficacious representatives. In all of these ways, the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, given in a unique way to St. Peter, the earthly head of the Christian Ministry, are used daily by all duly ordained Christian Ministers.

One prejudice of our day is that everything needs to be "democratic", whatever that means. In fact, many things would be destroyed by being made "democratic". I watched some fights on t.v. recently. Can you imagine anything duller than settling fights "democratically", by having the crowd vote on who wins rather than having the athletes prove who is the better fighter? Much more importantly, the Christian Ministry is not a "democratic" thing, any more than salvation is a "democratic" thing. Though given to all who are willing to have Faith and to strive, God's Grace inspiring and assisting, to live according to that Faith, Salvation is won only by One, Who then extends the Salvation He won to all who approach the Throne of Grace. The Lord extends His Salvation through the Christian Ministry, which started with the Apostles. The Apostles were not elected by the community, but personally chosen by the Lord. Today's Christian Ministers are not elected by the community, but ordained by the Church. Now, there is much room for discussion about how the Church picks deacons, priests and bishops. I personally am of the opinion that local communities ought to be given a clearer and stronger voice in the picking of deacons, priests, and bishops. Nonetheless, The Christian Ministry is not an essentially democratic thing. The Christian Ministry is the work of duly appointed ambassadors and representatives of Jesus Christ, who use the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven entrusted to them to open the spiritual treasures of Salvation to all humanity.

