

Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul
Acts 3:1-10; Ps 19; Gal 1:11-20; Jn 21:15-19

by Dr. Emilio G. Chávez
St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary
Boynton Beach, FL

This solemn and beautiful feast joins the two greatest apostles, who both ended their days in Rome, which they forever ennobled with their teaching and their blood. It is a feast of *communio*, fellowship (in Greek, *koinonia*, as in Gal 2:9), for these two strong-willed individuals did not always see eye to eye. In some ways Peter is the Roman Catholic apostle, while Paul is the Protestant's favorite. But in the end, communion prevails.

Peter was Jesus' leading disciple. Jesus gave him the name "Rock" (*Petros*, Mt 16:18); it was he who was to "make firm" the Church, Lk 22:32. But Paul angrily confronted Peter and accused him of hypocrisy, Gal 2:11-14. Peter had wavered on the issue of whether to keep one table for Christians, whether originally Jews or pagans, or to have separate tables for those who kept kosher and those who did not. This was an issue hotly debated in the early Church, Acts 15:5-29.

Paul was a newcomer. The risen Jesus had appeared to him last, 1 Cor 15:3-10. He prided himself on being an apostle, but did not meet the criterion set out in Acts 1:21-22; cf. 14:14. In Gal 1:11-20, he is at pains to show that he learned the Gospel by a special revelation, not from human beings (though he admits having consulted Peter for two weeks). Paul and his team evangelized the Gentiles, and after some years presented his message to the "pillars" of the Church in Jerusalem, which was Jewish. Both groups agreed that they were in communion, but a request was made: that the richer Gentile churches remember the poor of Jerusalem, Gal 2:7-10; cf. Rom 15:25-27. Ironically, Paul's delivery of this collection resulted in a riot, Acts 21, which led to his martyrdom.

According to the Gospel of John, Peter needed rehabilitation. Unlike the Beloved Disciple, who was at the foot of the cross, Peter had denied being a disciple, Jn 18:17, 25. In the end, Peter shows he is "preeminent in love" (as Ignatius of Antioch called the church of Rome). He became the face and name of the anonymous voice who told of the Suffering Servant in Is 53; see 1 Pt 2:21-25. He will imitate Jesus even in death, John 12:33; 21:19.