



Holy and Supreme Apostles Peter and Paul

The great apostles and teachers of Christ, linked together in the history of Christianity, were not so closely linked in life and differed from each other, both in character and in the circumstances of their lives.

Apostle Peter, a native of the city of Bethsaida and elder brother of Apostle Andrew, lived together with his family in the city of Capernaum and was a fisherman. His original name was Simon, while the appellation Peter (which means rock) he received from Jesus Christ Himself. Peter's life is highlighted in the Gospel more than the other apostles', because he was always at Christ's side, was greatly attached to Him, was the first to believe unreservedly in the Lord's divine mission. For this he was honored with special closeness to the Lord. Thus, together with the Apostles James and John, he was a witness to the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus, he saw the Lord's glory on Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration, he remained with Christ in the garden of Gethsemane on the eve of Judas' betrayal.

However, despite all his love and loyalty, Peter did not escape the terrible sin of apostasy, for which he later atoned his entire life. After Christ was arrested, the fainthearted Peter thrice renounced his divine Teacher, but in those fearful minutes, as the Lord meekly gazed upon him, Peter understood the gravity of what he had done and bitter tears of remorse welled up in him. His sincere repentance was accepted by the Lord and thus, when He appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other myrrh-bearing women on the day of His resurrection, He said to them: "Go and tell the apostles and Peter..." Soon afterwards, Christ once again reaffirmed Peter in his rank of apostle by saying three times: "Take care of My sheep." And Peter became one of the boldest preachers of the Gospel. On the day of the Pentecost he converted first 5,000 and later another 3,000 people to Christianity. Peter also became well-known for many miracles, and in Joppa he resurrected Tabitha from the dead, fearlessly bore witness to Christ before the Jewish elders and the Sanhedrin, was twice imprisoned and condemned to death, but after being miraculously freed by an angel he did not abandon his labor of spreading the faith. He visited many countries of the East and the West and finally died a martyric death in Rome in 57 A.D. Condemned to die on the cross, he asked to be crucified head down, believing himself to be unworthy of dying in the same manner as the Lord.

Apostle Paul originally had the name of Saul, which means "the one who has been obtained by prayer." He was a native of Tarsis, whose inhabitants enjoyed all the rights of Roman citizens. He was educated under the tutelage of Gamaliel, the most famous Jewish religious instructor of those times. Saul grew up an ardent defender of Jewish law and Jewish traditions. The preaching of the Gospel by the apostles caused great indignation in him, and he became one of their foremost persecutors. He even traveled to Damascus, where many of Christ's disciples were hiding from the Jews at that time, in order to bring them back to Jerusalem in chains. But on his way to Damascus a wondrous light from heaven shone on him, so brightly and powerfully that he was struck blind. At the same time the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Paul as that very individual whom he was persecuting. From that time on Paul became a new man, and from the mouth of the Lord in heaven Himself he received the supreme assignment of becoming apostle to the pagans. Soon thereafter Paul was baptized and miraculously regained his sight, and we then see him ardently preaching that very Christian faith which he had initially persecuted so cruelly. He now dedicated his entire life to this single great goal. The miracles he performed, the churches he founded, the speeches he made, the epistles he wrote, the huge and extraordinary success of his apostolic travels, the visions and revelations which he received from God, the imprisonment and suffering which he bore for Christ and, finally, the true

witnessing of his faith with a martyric end in Rome in 64 A.D. – all of this undoubtedly gave him the right to be ranked as a leading apostle, while the 14 epistles of Apostle Paul are honored by the Church as a source of true Christian teaching.

Instructing us, too, with their epistles and their life, the supreme apostles also show us how we should act when we are challenged by the enemies of our faith, who number among them, just as they did in ancient times, servers of the occult, i.e. sorcerers, magicians and extrasensers, and also the worshippers of idolatry, i.e. krishnaites and neo-pagans. Apostle Paul warns them and us: “*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: idolatry, witchcraft... they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Gal. 5:19-21).

Today, when all manner of sorcerers lead into temptation tens of thousands of souls that thirst after spiritual nourishment, should we not denounce them just as fearlessly by the power of Christ’s faith and words? Apostle Peter was not afraid when he loudly prayed in front of a huge crowd of Romans: “O Lord Jesus Christ, my God! Reveal to the people the false miracle produced by the sorcerer, so that he would not longer seduce the people who believe in Thee.” And right away, while being lifted up to heaven by demons, Simon the sorcerer fell to the ground and was smashed to death, to the accompaniment of mockery from the deceived crowd, whom the apostle immediately enlightened by preaching the Gospel. But we, lacking faith and being faint of heart, try to avoid denouncing modern false teachers and sorcerers, having obviously forgotten the Lord’s promise: “*Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you*” (Luke 10:19).

This promise was faithfully upheld by the supreme apostles Peter and Paul, as true disciples of Christ and propagators of His teaching.

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