

August 1

## FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT PETER IN CHAINS

### 149.1 First Point

This feast was instituted to thank God for the grace he gave the Church when he delivered Saint Peter from the prison where Herod Agrippa had put him with the plan to put him to death a few days later,<sup>710</sup> because he wanted to destroy the Christian religion from its beginning by condemning to death the one who was the leader. This prince took such great care to have Saint Peter guarded in the prison that he gave the assignment to a squad of sixteen soldiers divided into the four watches, four at a time.<sup>711</sup>

But what does anyone need to fear who has God for protector?<sup>712</sup> Kings have power over men and can dispose of their lives only if God allows them.<sup>713</sup> Thus, since the newborn Church still needed Saint Peter, he remained in Herod's hands for only a few days, even though Herod had him chained and guarded with what seemed so much security,<sup>714</sup> for God wanted to make use of all this to strengthen and uphold the newly established Church.

Let us adore God's power which makes sport of that of men when he pleases,<sup>715</sup> for men have no power, except in so far as he lets them share in his.

### 149.2 Second Point

While Peter was so closely guarded in prison, the Church raised prayers for him to God without ceasing, which were finally heard. The very night before Herod had determined to send Saint Peter to his punishment, this holy Apostle was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains, while guards stood watch at the prison door. Suddenly an angel appeared, filling the place with light. Tapping Saint Peter, he woke him and told him to rise promptly. At that same moment the chains fell away from his hands. This angel led Saint Peter passed the first and second guard and by the gate of iron, which opened by itself. At the end of the street, the angel left him. Then Saint Peter, who up to this point had thought all these happenings a dream or a vision, realized that, in fact, God had sent his angel to deliver him from the hands of Herod and from all the expectations of the Jewish people.<sup>716</sup>

Let us thank God with the Church for having freed Saint Peter in this way in order that he might have the chance to preach the Gospel and increase the flock of Jesus Christ.<sup>717</sup>

### 149.3 Third Point

Having gone to a house where several persons had gathered and were praying. Saint Peter told them how God had freed him from prison.<sup>718</sup> At this all thanked God for the goodness he had shown him. The chains which had bound Saint Peter have always been preserved in the Church with great veneration as precious relics, and have performed many miracles.

The greatest miracle that they should produce in our hearts is a love for suffering and insult, for we cannot go to heaven save by following the path of tribulation.<sup>719</sup> We should, says Saint Paul, glory in the cross of Jesus Christ,<sup>720</sup> that is, in the cross Jesus Christ has sanctified by carrying it, and which is our life and our salvation, because it is the source of these blessings.

As we, along with all the Church, pay homage to the chains Saint Peter bore, let us also honor those that God has placed on us. Let us beg him that just as the two chains of this holy Apostle miraculously became one, so, too, our sufferings may be so closely united to his through grace that we will share in the desire he had to suffer for Jesus Christ.

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This feast is no longer celebrated, but veneration of the chains of Saint Peter was widespread as early as the fifth century. Similarly there was devotion to the chains of Saint Paul. Peter's chains are still venerated in the Roman Basilica of S. Pietro in Vincoli (where tourists may also see Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses). What are believed to be Paul's chains are also preserved in the basilica near his tomb on the Ostian Way.

710 Acts 12:3  
711 Acts 12:4  
712 Ps 27:1  
713 Jn 19:11  
714 Acts 12:6

715 Ps 2:4  
716 Acts 12:5-11  
717 Jn 21:15-17  
718 Acts 12:12-17  
719 Acts 14:22

720 Gal 6:14