

Reading for the Feast of the Chair of St Peter

22nd February 2025

First reading

1 Peter 5:1-4

‘A fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.’

Beloved: I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23(22):1-3a. 3b-4. 5. 6. R1

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The Lord is my shepherd;

there is nothing I shall want.

Fresh and green are the pastures

where he gives me repose.

Near restful waters he leads me;

he revives my soul.

He guides me along the right path,

for the sake of his name.

Though I should walk in the valley of the shadow of death,

no evil would I fear, for you are with me.

Your crook and your staff will give me comfort.

You have prepared a table before me

in the sight of my foes.

My head you have anointed with oil;

my cup is overflowing.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life.

In the Lord's own house shall I dwell

for length of days unending.

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 16:18

Alleluia, alleluia.

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

and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Alleluia.

Gospel

Matthew 16:13-19

‘You are Peter, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’

At that time: When Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell

you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'

Short reflection on the reading for today

The early Christians in Rome honoured and commemorated the day when Simon Peter held his first service with the faithful in the capital city, under the title "*Cathedra Petri*" (the Chair of Peter in Rome). By the ninth century this feast was assigned to 22nd February, and its celebration was held in two places, in the Vatican Basilica and in a cemetery on the Via Salaria. In both places a chair (*cathedra*) was venerated, in memory of when the Apostle was presiding at the faith assembly in Rome.

Admittedly the report in Matthew chapter 16 can be, and has often been, misused as a Gospel justification for inflated claims to worldwide *jurisdiction* and absolute *monarchy*, concepts far removed from the mind of Christ and indeed from that of Peter himself, as seen in the first reading, where Peter sees himself as "*sym-presbyteros*" a fellow-elder, and clearly prefers the role of assistant to Christ the chief shepherd, over that of lawgiver, oracle or pontiff. As illustrated in the papal style of pope Francis, the Matthean texts about Peter must be read in context of many other texts in our Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, to get a rounded picture of the kind of ministry exercised and passed on by St Peter. Today's feast links the origins of papacy to the apostolic ministry of the successor of St Peter as visible head of our worldwide Catholic Church. It invites us to pray for divine guidance on our present pope and on the Church of God, that we may be led into a new era of hopeful, life-affirming Catholicism by a fraternal papal ministry mirroring the beautiful ideal expressed by St Peter himself.