



## REVERENCE TO LEADERS OF CHRISTIANITY

During the final General Audience of the "Year of Faith" on Wednesday June 26 the Holy Father, urging renewed devotion of the Founders of the Church of Rome, made known the discovery of the relics of St. Peter.

### **Beloved Sons and Daughters,**

At the conclusion of the "Year of Faith" which We dedicated to the memory of the 19th centenary of the martyrdom suffered at Rome by the holy Apostles Peter and Paul for the name of Christ, we must turn our thoughts with reverence to these Leaders of christianity, who can be considered to be, as they were described at the end of the first century by Pope St. Clement I, third successor of St. Peter and thus fourth Bishop of the Roman See, "the highest and most upright columns" (I Cor. V) of the "pilgrim Church of God at Rome" (ib.), and were thenceforth always honoured together as the apostolic foundations of the Roman and universal Church.

### **Peter and Paul:**

#### **Foundation and Architect of the Church of Rome**

This is not the moment to pronounce a panegyric on them nor to introduce historical questions with reference to the coming of one or other of them to Rome and to their martyrdom, nor yet to speak of the development of that veneration which Rome and the entire christian world paid to these incomparable witnesses to the christian message and to its reality. It is not even the moment for considering how in this remembrance

of them they have always been associated together as one (cf. St. Ignatius ad Rom. IV), though, as St. Ambrose says, St. Peter was the foundation of the Church, while St. Paul was the architect, the builder (De Sp. S. II, 13, 158; P.L. 16, 808). He means that their functions in the Christian community at Rome were diverse—the one, St. Peter, being the Bishop; the other, St. Paul, being the Preacher of the Gospel, although as St. Irenaeus affirms, both together combined to originate the hierarchic tradition of the Church of Rome (Contra haereses III, 3; P. G. 7, 848-849)

### The Tombs of the Apostles at Rome

What concerns us in the present brief meeting is to re-enkindle in our minds our veneration, love, fidelity towards these Apostles who constituted the beginnings of the Roman Church and left to her the heritage of their word, of their authority, of their blood, equal in their diversity, as St. Leo proclaims them: “electio pares, et labor similes, et finis fecit aequales”—on a par by their election to the apostolate, alike in the work they did, and made equal by their martyrdom (Sermo 82, 7; P. L. 54, 428). But the one was endowed with the powers of the Kingdom of Heaven, the other with the knowledge of things divine; the one was the Shepherd, the other the Teacher. We are helped toward the increase of these sentiments of veneration, by the traces, historical and local, left behind by them and at the same time inevitably interested in these latter. They could not be overlooked by us Romans nor by those who move about Rome, human and material records as they are of the memory of the Apostles “per quos religionis sumpsit exordium”—through whom our religious life had its origin (Collect of the Mass). Let us recall, too, the first written record of this local veneration. Eusebius of Caesarea, father of ecclesiastical history, writes: “It is told that Paul was beheaded by him (Nero) and Peter crucified at Rome; and this is now confirmed by the splendid monuments to the names of Peter and Paul still visited in the cemeteries of the city of Rome. For the rest, Gaius, an ecclesiastic who lived at the time when Zepherinus was Bishop of Rome (199-217), in writing against Proclus, leader of the Montanist sect (Kataphrygians), speaks of the places where the sacred remains of the said apostles were deposited: I can show you the trophies of the Apos-

cles. If you will go to the Vatican or along the Via Ostiensis you will find the trophies of the founders of this Church" (Hist. Eccl. II, 25: P. L. 20, 207-210).

### **Excavation under the High Altar of St. Peter's**

A good deal has been said in recent years about these "trophies" for no one doubts that by "trophies" are meant the tombs of the two martyr Apostles, which were already objects of veneration before the evidence of this offered by Gaius, and therefore in the second century. Recently the attention of those studying the matter has been fixed on the trophy erected over the tomb of St. Peter, appropriately called the trophy of Gaius. We owe this tremendous interest to the excavations which our venerated Predecessor Pope Pius XII ordered to be made under this central altar, called the "Confession", in St. Peter's Basilica, so as the better to identify the tomb of the Apostle over which, and in its honour, this Basilica was erected. These excavations, very difficult and very delicate, were carried out between 1940 and 1950, with archaeological results of the greatest importance as everyone knows, by outstanding archaeologists and workmen whose devoted care given to this arduous investigation is worthy of praise and recognition. In his Christmas broadcast on December 23rd, 1950, Pope Pius XII spoke thus of the matter: "...the essential question is this: Has the tomb of St. Peter actually been discovered? The final conclusion of the work and of the study answers the question with a most clear Yes. The tomb of the Prince of the Apostles has been found. A second question, following on the first, is in regard to the relics of the Saint. Have these been discovered? (Discourses and Broadcasts XII, 380). The reply given at that time by the venerated Pontiff left the matter in suspense, in doubt.

### **The final discovery of the Relics**

New most patient and accurate investigations have been subsequently pursued, with a result that, relying on the judgment of worthy and prudent persons, We believe to be positive: The relics also of St. Peter have been identified in a manner that We cannot but accept as convincing, and We give praise to those who have undertaken this most careful study and this long and heavy labour.

This will not exhaust the researches, verifications, discussions. But it seems a manifest duty on Our part, at this present point in the archaeological and scientific conclusions, to make this happy pronouncement to you and to the Church, obliged as we are to honour sacred relics which bear a serious proof of their authenticity, for they were at one time living members of Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit, destined for a glorious resurrection. (cf. Denz. Sch. 1822); and in the present instance we have to be all the more solicitous, all the more exultant, seeing that now we have every reason to believe that there have been discovered the mortal remains, few it is true but sacrosanct, of the Prince of the Apostles, of Simon Barjona, of the Fisherman called by Christ Peter, of him who was chosen by Our Lord to be the foundation of his Church, and to whom Our Lord confided the supreme keys of his kingdom together with the mission of feeding and uniting his flock, redeemed humanity, until His own final glorious return.

### **Our Master and Protectors**

Dear children, let us invoke the martyr, apostle, bishop of Rome and of the Catholic Church, Peter, and with him Paul, the missionary, the doctor of the gentiles, the principal protagonist of the universality of the christian message, that from heaven both of them may be our Masters and our Protectors in our earthly pilgrimage.

May the apostolic blessing, which comes to us from them, be for you all productive of the most abundant graces of Jesus Christ.