

The Kiss of Virtues

As we know, the classical icon of this blessed feast pictures the two apostles embracing each other with a kiss. People give different meanings to this apostolic kiss. Some see it as the kiss of reconciliation between the two saints after their quarrel in Antioch. Others understand it as the meeting of the East (represented by St. Paul) with the West (represented by St. Peter). Others also see it as symbolizing the common end of these two apostles who were martyred in Rome. The former was beheaded, and the latter was crucified, imitating His Master.

Whatever the explanations are, we see that the last explanation forms a more constructive and correct view. Anyway, for us, these two apostles represent two different worlds, or better, two distinctive Biblical personalities or characters. Each one of them had excelled in great virtues. There are three virtues that distinguished Paul, and three others that distinguished Peter.

From the texts of the New Testament, we notice three characteristics of Paul that greatly helped him to succeed in his mission and hard labor.

1. The Apostle Paul was a Roman citizen, having special civic rights. He used these rights many times

according to his needs, as when he was liberated from the prison in Philippi upon revealing his Roman citizenship. He also refused to be judged by the Jewish authorities, and asked to be sent to Rome and be judged by Ceasar himself. So here we see the use of authority in St. Paul.

2. The apostle knew the Greek language very well, and that's why God saw him as a "chosen vessel" and sent him to the Gentiles. Through his knowledge of the Greek language, Paul captured for Christ the great and civilized Greek world. He used philosophy and language as a tool for dialogue and reaching out to others in the service of the Divine Word.

3. His third characteristic is his Jewish religion.. He belonged to the Jews of the Diaspora, was proud to be a Pharisee and a student of Gamaliel. Here we face the question of religion.

As for St. Peter, we also note three of his virtues.

1. When Peter answered positively to the question, "Do you love me?", he was directed by Jesus to the care of the flock. Love then is pastoral service. So here we note service.

2. The greatest event in the life of St. Peter is his beautiful confession, "You are Christ the Son of the living God." This Truth was held by the Lord as the rock upon which he builds His Church.

3. From the texts of the New Testament, we clearly notice that Peter much more than all the apostles always wanted to show his zeal for the love of Christ. This zeal pushed him to promise Jesus to follow Him till death, to cut the ear of the Chief priests' servant, and to throw himself into the waters of the lake of Tiberias in

order to be the first to meet the Risen Christ. So Peter was characterized also by his noble zeal.

Truly, the three characteristics from each saint complete each other. For authority has to be service, and philosophy truth, and religion zeal of burning love.

The true meaning of authority is caring for people. "Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all" (Mark 10:43-44 AV). True philosophy is true Christianity, and true knowledge leads to Christian faith.

Truly, without the burning love of zeal, religion loses its vitality and becomes simply pharisaic, static, formal, and dead.

Yes, the way is care in authority, and the truth is the right philosophy, and the life is the vital and zealous religion. In fact, the virtues of St. Peter embracing those of St. Paul, the interweaving of these two worlds, and the meeting of the characteristics of these two saints realizes the cry of Jesus, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."