

“Pope Benedict's Sixtieth Anniversary of Priestly Ordination” - St Peter and St Paul 2011

Today, sixty years ago, Pope Benedict was ordained a priest. He was twenty-four years old and was ordained with his brother Georg and more than forty others in the Cathedral of Freising, near Munich. Recalling the day, some years before he was elected pope, the Holy Father wrote: “We should not be superstitious but at the moment when the elderly archbishop laid his hands on me, a little bird -- perhaps a lark -- flew up from the high altar in the cathedral and trilled a little joyful song. And I could not but see in this a reassurance from on high, as if I heard the words, 'This is good; you are on the right way.'”

What a wonderful day to be ordained: the Church celebrating Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and the first pope, with Paul, the great missionary to the pagan world, who both laid down their lives in faith and love.

It would be possible to see today as simply a day to remember and give thanks for two great historical figures in the Church; in many ways, the two pillars upon which the Church has been raised. It would be possible and wrong for today is not about the past but our present and future.

Peter’s ministry continues in the person of Pope Benedict and Paul’s ministry has never stopped through the lives of countless missionaries. What Christ gave us in these two men, two thousand years ago, He continues to give in 2011.

And we have the reassurance of the continuing prayers of our two saints. In 452, Attila the Hun was marching on Rome, preparing to plunder and kill. But Pope St Leo the Great went out to meet him and persuaded him to not enter the Eternal City. This moment is depicted in stone above St Leo’s tomb in St Peter’s Basilica. Yet with the pope and Attila, the sculptor has also depicted SS. Peter and Paul, flying, as it were, above the two men, interceding for Rome and its inhabitants. Our fisherman and tent maker continue to do good work on Earth by praying for us in Heaven.