

# "The great god Pan is dead"



In this chaotic woodland party, men and women dance, drink, left to their own wild and base passions. They gather around the statue of a red-faced satyr with horns, half man half goat, which represents Pan, god of shepherds and herdsmen, god of nature and fertility, god of woods and forests. This painting, at the National Gallery, by Nicolas Poussin, is also known as 'The triumph of Pan'. The triumph of sin, the power of our passions, the influence of darkness, the exaltation of all ('pan' in Greek means 'all') that is animal, lustful and savage.

According to the Greek historian Plutarch (*in De defectu oraculorum*, "The Obsolescence of Oracles"), Pan is the only Greek god who actually dies. During the reign of Tiberius (AD 14–37), the news of Pan's death came to one Thamus, a sailor on his way to Italy by way of the island of Paxi. A divine voice hailed him across the salt water, "Thamus, are you there? When you reach Palodes, take care to proclaim that the great god Pan is dead." Which Thamus did, and the news was greeted from shore with groans and laments.

This 'news' has become the 'Good News' in today's Sunday Gospel. The dialogue between Jesus and Simon Peter takes place in the region of Caesarea Philippi, the Roman name of the old city of Paneas. It is here that a temple-sanctuary dedicated to the god Pan had been erected, and in this very same place we hear Peter (the Church) announcing Jesus Christ as Son of the Living God.

It is the death of the god Pan and the triumph of the only God. The defeat of Satan and his demons, the victory of Christ and his Church. All other 'gods' are dead and empty; all demons have perished; all the powers of darkness have been conquered; all passions and sins have been defeated. We can dance not around the statue of a dead god but as the body of a living God, we can sing to 'the death of the great god Pan and the triumph of the only living God, Jesus Christ, our Lord'.

*In honor.*

Father Ivano