

November 23, 2024

Daily Reflections



Center for Spiritual Development

THE PERSISTENCE OF FAITH

By Elisabeth Beall

An Excerpt from Today's Gospel

*Jesus said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
Simon Peter said in reply,
"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah.
For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father.
And so I say to you, you are Peter,
and upon this rock I will build my Church,
and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.
I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of heaven.
Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven;
and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

MATTHEW 16:15-19

Reflection

Although he is a saint and is considered the first Pope, Peter is no lofty example of a virtuousness we can never possibly achieve. Rather, he is the perfect example of an imperfect person on a faith journey where the right answer doesn't always seem absolutely clear.

In today's Gospel, Peter demonstrates a beautiful faith – so different from Thomas, who needed to touch the resurrected Christ's wounds before he would believe. And Jesus responds with a pleased recognition of that faith. He tells Peter that he is the man upon whom the future church will have its foundation. Yet just a few verses later, when Peter tries to reassure Jesus that he does not need to suffer the Passion and Crucifixion, Jesus chides him as roughly as possible. Peter is thinking as a mere human being, Jesus points out, but first he says to the disciple, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me."
(Matthew 16:23)

What a blow! And there's more to come. As the time draws nearer for Jesus to suffer and be crucified, and he warns his disciples that their faith in him will be shaken, Peter stoutly responds, "Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be." (Matthew 26:32) Given how soundly Jesus had spoken of Peter's strength – going so far as to call him a rock – you can hardly blame Peter for feeling over-confident here.

Not so fast, Jesus says, foretelling Peter's threefold denial. Peter stands firm, denying that he will deny the Lord – which is exactly what he does later in this very same chapter.

Talk about whiplash. As devoted as he is to Jesus, as determined as he is to follow his example and his commands, Peter simply doesn't get it right every time.

And neither do we. But the beauty of our faith, of our relationship with Jesus, is that second chances – or even third or fourth chances – are a given. It's not that God expects us to get things right the first time around – it's that God urges us to keep trying.

Peter is a lot of things: he is the first leader of the fledgling Christian church; he is a coward and a liar; he is faith-filled; he is far from fully self-aware. Like all of us, he is a mishmash of good and bad qualities: he is human. Jesus didn't give up on Peter, and he doesn't give up on us. We should not ask ourselves if we are doing better or worse than Peter on any given day; the question to ask is if we have the persistence of Peter, to struggle to our feet again after we stumble and fall.



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For Pondering

- Looking at the many virtues and faults of Peter that are spotlighted in Scripture, which of them do you identify with the most? Which inspire you to live your faith more deeply?
 - Think of a time when you thought you were doing the right thing, but you discovered otherwise. How did you react? How did you change course?
 - Have you ever had an experience where you felt God was chiding you, or guiding you to change direction? How did that experience impact your relationship with God?
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For Prayer

*Loving God,
With the example of St. Peter before me,
I pray for the strength to follow his example in
lively faith,
firm hope and burning love,
complete detachment from myself,
patience in adversity,
humility in prosperity,
recollection in prayer,
purity of heart,
a right intention in all my works,
diligence in fulfilling the duties of my state of life,
constancy in my resolutions,
and the persistence to keep striving to do your will.
Amen.*

ADAPTED FROM THE NOVENA TO ST. PETER

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