

SILENT REFLECTIONS

29 June 2021

From Sinking Sand to Solid Rock: Reflections on the Feast of St Peter

Today the church commemorates the Apostle Peter. Often his Feast Day is combined with St Paul, they can be separated, and St Paul is commemorated on 25 January (Conversion of St Paul). Peter is the disciple who is remembered for making mistakes; for putting his foot in it; and for ultimately denying Jesus. He is however the great example of how our failings can know the unlimited patience and forgiveness of God; that redemption and a fresh start can lead us to do wonderful things for God.

We will make a journey looking at some passages in Matthew's gospel. As we look at these passages we will have an opportunity to reflect on what Peter's story and life with Christ may mean for us: how Peter can encourage us to deepen our relationship with the Lord.

Matthew 4.18-19

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.'

This was the moment in Peter's life when, with his brother Andrew, Jesus invited Peter to Follow him. No longer would he simply be a fishermen casting out a net for fish, but his work would go beyond such things: his task was to be a disciple, 'a learner in the school of Christ', and invite others to join in with him.

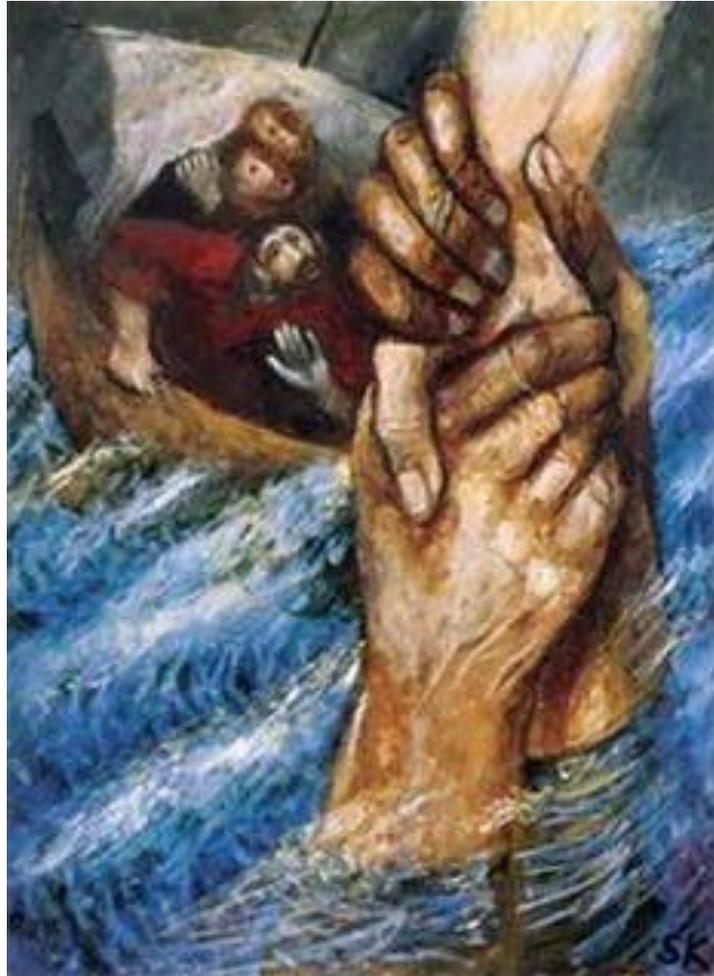
For prayer and reflection:

We see here that we don't always come to Jesus ourselves; but he always comes to us with the gracious invitation 'Follow me?' Can you recall the moment when you began to follow Jesus? Or, has it been a series of moments, an ongoing journey? Perhaps it is about answering the call to follow each day, in an intentional way?

Matthew 14.28-32

28 Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' 29 He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.



By Sieger Köder

*Again Peter receives the invitation to **come** to Jesus. This time it requires a greater leap of faith. Peter begins by thinking he can walk across the water. But, when he encounters the elements, he becomes afraid, sinks, and cries out to the Lord to be saved. When Jesus reaches out for him, he chastises Peter with the words: 'Why did you doubt'.*

For prayer and reflection

Notice how when he got into the boat the wind ceased. There will be many moments in our lives when Jesus feels absent, appears to leave us to our own devices and to all that may harm us, but is always there, whatever happens for good or ill. What is it that you may need to place into the hand of Jesus as he reaches out in love to you so that his perfect love will cast out fear?

Matthew 17.1-4

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.'

In this well-known passage, Peter had an impulsiveness about him. He would not be shy to ask questions. As he saw the glory of God revealed in Jesus all he could think about was for the experience to last forever and the kingdom starting from here. He didn't stop to think that after this something else would happen: that Jesus would give his life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20.28)

For prayer and reflection:

Are there things in our lives that prevent us from moving on? Are we fearful of stepping out into the unknown? You might like to think of a time when it has been difficult to move forward? Does moving forward in the knowledge that Jesus is with us always help us there is always more: that even when we have to leave behind those experiences we enjoy or make us feel comfortable and safe He leads us on.

Matthew 26.33-35

³³Peter said to him, 'Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.' ³⁴Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' ³⁵Peter said to him, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And so said all the disciples.

Promises! Promises! Here is another example of Peter's impulsive speech. He believes that he has the inner strength and resolve never to turn his back on Jesus; never to deny him. Jesus warns Peter that the time will come and he will deny him three times. The moment does come and Peter weeps bitterly.

For prayer and reflection:

To what extent do we examine ourselves before we make a promise, not least to God? How do we know whether we will be able to keep it? Have there been times when we have spoken rashly, too quickly, impulsively, like Peter? What has happened as a result?

Matthew 26.75

⁷⁵Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: 'Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly.

It's happened. The prophecy of Jesus comes true and Peter, when put on the spot, denies his Lord and Teacher. The memory is too much for him; he leaves the courtyard and weeps bitterly.

For prayer and reflection:

When have we been challenged to speak for Christ and kept silent? Have we denied Jesus, knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes our denial can be done quite passively, but we miss an opportunity. Yet we know that with Jesus there is mercy and forgiveness which knows no bounds and if he can redeem Peter and use him mightily on the Day of Pentecost, he can use us too. (cf Acts 2)

Matthew 16:13-19

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' ¹⁴And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' ¹⁵He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

For all his mistakes, for the times when he has spoken without thinking, Jesus still trusts in Peter. Peter is 'the Rock', on which Jesus will build His church. No matter how much Peter has failed, the future of the church is built on solid rock and this gospel passage is set in the Eucharistic lectionary for today.

For prayer and reflection:

In these words we encounter the mystery of the church, and that Jesus makes his promise to the fallible and fearful, the failing and the sinful. The church prevails not because of its personnel, but only because of the fidelity of God. The church can get it spectacularly wrong, but it will always be held in the providence of God. Perhaps Peter's Feast Day asks us to consider again what it means to be part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? And.....for the church to depend on God.

The Collect for Peter the Apostle

Almighty God, who inspired your apostle Saint Peter to confess Jesus as Christ and Son of the living God: build up your Church upon this rock, that in unity and peace it may proclaim one truth and follow one Lord, your Son our Saviour Christ. Amen.