

God Chose Peter

Fr. Daniel Scheidt

Hello, I'm Father Daniel Scheidt, and we now invite St. Peter to join us in our Lenten journey of healing by the cross of Christ as we pray.

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you chose Peter to be the rock on which you would build your church. You promised that the gates of another world would never prevail against it. We ask through the intercession of this apostle that you would give us all of the graces that we need to share what you have won for your church in Peter's life and mission, you who are Lord forever and ever. Amen.

An Ordinary Person

We should say at the very beginning that St. Peter was an ordinary person, which means that Jesus chose as the head of the apostles, somebody who wasn't a king or an emperor who was born to rule. Jesus didn't choose some type of mystic with special secret knowledge that only he could know. Jesus also didn't choose a professional religious person, and there were plenty of those at the time. People who were part of the Levitical priesthood, for example, who had functions in the temple sacrifices. Jesus called none of those. And we should also point out that Peter wasn't even a scholar of the law.

The Commercial Fishermen

He was just an ordinary person, but a certain type of ordinary person. Jesus chose as the first four apostles, Peter, Andrew, James, and John, commercial fishermen. These were not ordinary poor folk. They were businessmen. They owned the boat, and they were engaged in a commercial enterprise that required of them entrepreneurship, which means they were experts in dealing with people.

Even more significantly, Peter and the first other apostles, his brother Andrew, and then the brothers James and John, they were used to spending long stretches of time every day on the open water under the open heavens, which means they had a lot of time for contemplation. And they were also exposed to danger on a regular basis, a storm coming up, the possibility of drowning. They were poised between an enormous depth above in the heavens and an enormous depth below in the sea. Jesus wanted Peter to be formed by that.

We should also say that fishermen are used to having setbacks, are used to catching nothing even after many, many hours of effort. And they're also used to abundance. "What do we do when we have more than the nets and the boats can hold?" Jesus chose apostles who weren't

intimidated by reality, and he did that so that Peter could be equipped with what he needed for his spiritual mission. And this is multifold.

Peter's Role

Jesus calls him Simon, son of Jonah, that's his original name, calls him Peter for several reasons. First, we should look at what it means to be called son of Jonah. Most obviously Jonah's the name of Peter's father, but it's also the name of the prophet. The prophet who was swallowed up after he had run away and forced to go deeper. This mystery of the prophet Jonah is also the description of St. Peter's life. He will run away, he will deny his Lord, and the circumstances of his life will force him to go deeper. Also, the fact that he is the rock on which the church is built.

When we look at the book of Revelation in the last chapter, we see that the heavenly Jerusalem is built on the foundation of the 12 apostles. Their witness is foundational for the life of the church. And here too, Peter shows us something of our own life of faith, because when we're in communion with Peter the rock, we allow Christ to make our life foundational for other people's belief in the Lord. When we don't become a scandal, a stumbling block to the Lord, we can become a stepping stone for others to know Him and to love Him.

Jesus also promises Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven. These keys that bind in loose. In the Book of Isaiah in the 22nd chapter, there is a man named Aaliyah Keem of the royal household, the chief steward or the prime minister, if you will, who is also entrusted with the key, the key of opening access to the King or closing access to the King. Peter is given this responsibility in the household of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, Jesus Christ in the church, and it's Peter's witness that will help determine the genuineness of other people being able to encounter the true Lord and Savior as opposed to what other people may be claiming about Jesus.

There's an authenticity in Peter's witness when he cries out filled with the Holy Spirit. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This becomes a perpetual living reference point of authentic relation to who Jesus is. Additionally, Peter is given the task of confirming the brethren after the great sifting of the passion of Jesus. And this role of confirming the unity of the church continues in the work of the successors of Peter, the popes of maintaining unity in church teaching, unity in worship of the living God in the Holy Eucharist and the sacraments, and also unity of shepherding with the bishops throughout the world. And in this point in the church's history, there are about 5,600 Catholic bishops throughout the world fulfilling the Great Commission. And the Pope confirms all of these in unity so that we may be one as Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Faced With Temptation

In our Lenten journey though, we actually do need to look with eyes wide open at Peter's denial of knowing his Savior. And this is instructive for us because we're faced in innumerable ways with a similar temptation. Peter was tempted to make hasty promises and catastrophic failures based on those hasty promises, and yet he had the consolation of knowing that even those were enfolded in the Lord's providence.

So even the disasters of our life when we don't live up to our commitments, even those are enfolded in the Lord's goodness and His ability to bring good from them is infinite. We also see in Peter's denial that when we allow ourselves to be isolated from those who can help us and encourage us, we become very vulnerable to forgetting who we are or giving into the pressure of other people who might want something from us that is not true to who we're made in the Lord's image to be.

Peter also shows us that Jesus at the Last Supper pre-blesses the apostles in the washing of their feet. Jesus knows that they will run away from Him. He knows that they will deny and betray Him, but Peter is given the grace to come back. When Mary Magdalene comes running from the tomb, Mary Magdalene, the apostle to the apostles saying, "I've seen the Lord." Peter will run in her footsteps to see for himself, and he will run back to the other apostles. He will come out on the balcony at Pentecost with the homily of the resurrection. He will run with the apostles to the ends of the earth to share the good news that Christ is risen from the dead.

We have been pre-blessed in the waters of baptism. We've been given the divine life irrevocably. We belong to the Lord even if we were to deny Him. "God is faithful," Saint Paul says, and he cannot be unfaithful to himself. And so Peter is also in this, the one who shows us the gift of tears. Peter's tears are not tears of despair or self-hatred. He does not go the way of Judas in giving into despair. Rather, his tears are purifying. They bathe him in a type of second baptism, if you will, the second baptism of which Christ speaks of being baptized into His passion, not just in the river Jordan, that's the first baptism of Jesus, but the very baptism of his passion where Peter has the love of God awakened in him again.

And when we come to the sacrament of reconciliation, in the gift of tears, if they come, we can feel on our cheeks the mercy of God. Peter reveals to us that we are not the sum total of our failures. In the sacrament of reconciliation, in the loosening of our sins, our worst shame gets transformed into our greatest victory. What we thought was simply our humiliation and failure is actually transformed into honesty, into courage, into humility, and love and faith and hope.

Becoming A Shepherd

When Peter denies the Lord at the charcoal fire after the apostles flee in the garden of Gethsemane, he sees in that charcoal fire his own burning failure, he weeps bitterly. And yet God is so good that on the morning of the resurrection, at the first breakfast so to speak, Peter will encounter a charcoal fire again. And here is not a serving girl as on the night of Jesus's betrayal, but actually the Lord Himself. He's using that charcoal fire to prepare bread and fish to feed Peter and to forgive him.

That's the context for the threefold question, "Do you love me?" That actually allows Peter to overcome his threefold denial. And with each of Peter's, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." With each of those, Jesus confirms Peter in his new mission, "Tend my sheep, feed my sheep, feed my lambs." It's amazing to think that Peter starts out as a fisherman, but he actually ends as a shepherd.

Again, Jesus could have very well began with choosing 12 shepherds by profession, but he didn't. He wanted us to see in Peter that no matter where we are in our life, we are actually made capable by God of radically new things. And that will involve, of course, learning all sorts of new skills, allowing our mind to be expanded, our hearts open to new possibilities. But that's the graced life.

And I think it's also important for us to know that Peter doesn't exercise this new life alone. He does it amid a great cloud of witnesses. And it's also true for us. None of us has to exercise our practice of the faith in union with Peter alone. We do it in networks of friendship. Even if that friendship is largely invisible, the angels and the saints, Jesus promises even where two or more are gathered. He is there in our midst, and we could give such thanks that Peter is always with us. His mission continues in the life of the church. He remains serving his Lord faithfully, and so we pray.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in the life and the mission that you have given to us. We ask that by the prayers and living witness of St. Peter, we ask by our own communion with the Pope in the teaching and worship obligations and shepherding of the church that you would confirm us anew in who we are truly meant to be. Your followers, your friends, your royal family, saints in the making, one and all for the kingdom where you are, Lord, forever and ever. Amen.