

Trinity V (30 June 2024)

“When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

+In the Name...

Once again, our Kalendar and lectionary have aligned: yesterday was the feast of St. Peter, which always falls on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June. Today is the Fifth Sunday of Trinity, but its date varies based on the date of Easter. Yet this year, they fell a day apart, which led me to believe that I could not preach today without talking about our friend Peter.

Biblical scholars (and others) love to criticize Peter. He was likely uneducated, he was hot-headed, and he seemed to have a propensity to say the wrong thing at the wrong time. Sometimes I think he is just an obvious person to pick on. The Roman Church claims that he was the first pope, and orthodox Christians are a perennial favorite for biblical scholars to criticize. Perhaps it is part of a larger societal trend of making ourselves look better by

belittling others. I know better than to make a political comparison, but sometimes I am just unable to sufficiently stifle the political scientist in me. I honestly was too busy cleaning my toothbrush on Thursday to watch more than a snippet of the presidential debate. But the one thing that everyone I talked to had in common was that they could say nothing positive about either of the candidates. My Republican friends argued that Biden could not say anything intelligent, and my Democratic friends argued that Trump could not say anything truthful. Apparently, no one thought his candidate had done a particularly remarkable job. Maybe neither did. But even if we are not good at anything, at least we can always feel better about ourselves by tearing down our opponents! Ah, yes, I feel better about myself already. Imagine how good I should feel about myself by the beginning of November!

Indeed, Peter was not a scholar like St. Paul. Paul was a very learned man in the Jewish faith. Before his conversion on the road

to Damascus, he was well regarded by the who's who of Judaism and was a member of the Sanhedrin. Peter, on the other hand, was a fisherman. They were known for being a little rough around the edges. And while there is much one has to know about the trade to be a successful fisherman, it does not come at the end of a long course of learning from books. Back to my presidential example: the Oval Office has been filled with any number of lawyers and scholars, but no fishermen. At least, none who chose it as a career. Perhaps we would do better if we chose as our next president someone who made a living fishing and only dabbled in politics as a hobby instead of vice versa. Then maybe the candidates could discuss the issues instead of arguing over who has the better golf game!

But back to Peter. Peter was a good fisherman. And he was in business with other good fishermen: his brother Andrew, and the brothers James and John. Peter was a devout man, and was a

follower of John the Baptist before he answered the call to follow Our Lord.

If you were at Mass yesterday or read the Propers out of your Prayer Book, you know that the Gospel reading appointed was the famous selection from the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

“Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church.” The cleverness of Our Lord is lost sadly, when rendered unto English because “Peter” and “rock” are the same word in both Latin and Greek but not in English. The Roman Church interprets this statement, along with the handing over of the keys and institution of episcopal authority as the institution of the papacy. These words are repeated to all the apostles elsewhere in Scripture, and for the first one thousand years of Christianity the Bishop of Rome did not wield the power that he has come to hold these last thousand years. That being said, while we can deny that the Bishop of Rome is the Vicar of Christ or that he has universal jurisdiction, we cannot remain faithful to the Scriptures and Holy

Tradition while denying that Peter played an important role, even amongst the other Apostles. He, along with his former fishing partners, were present when Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead. Only those three were present at Our Lord's Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. And only those three were present to watch the agony on the Cross.

Speaking of the episode in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter is often accused of being a coward because after Our Lord was arrested Peter denied knowing Him. Yet just moments before, Peter had taken his sword and cut off the ear of someone Peter believed was threatening the safety of his master. That part was logical enough. What Peter was not expecting was Jesus' response, telling Peter to put away his sword and basically let the Jews who had come for Him to do what they wanted. Peter's response was then likely out of perplexity, and if fear, fear because he could not defend himself as he knew how. How would we have acted in a similar predicament? God willing, we will never be

confronted with an analogous situation, but we should pause to consider what our own bravery, or lack thereof, might have looked like.

Are lack of bravery and lack of faith then linked? They could be but not necessarily. When Peter doubted they would catch any fish after he had just spent hours fishing when the fish *should* have been biting, only to be told by an amateur to try again at a time when the fish should *not* have been biting, showed a lack of faith but not a lack of courage.

We are told in many places in Holy Scripture that if we choose to follow Christ and lead a life worthy of that calling, we will face challenges. And that is just us regular joes! Peter was hardly a regular joe and not even just one of the twelve, but a patriarch of the Church. As far as the devil is concerned, all believing Christians have a target on their backs, but the target of a prince of the Church must be applied with permanent glow-in-the-dark paint!

We will all have days where we, like Peter, fail Our Lord. He knows it and we know it. The key is to be like Peter and acknowledge our failing. God already knows it; we are just choosing to be honest with ourselves. Without honesty there is no repentance. Without repentance there cannot be confession. And without confession there is no absolution. And without absolution? Well, Scripture tells us that the wages of sin is death. I am not sure where that falls compared to the minimum wage, and I doubt that it will make the next presidential debate. I am sure that Peter's humility would make a welcome addition not just to the Church and American politics, but to American society as a whole.

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