

INTRODUCTION

PETER

Men speak of the paintings of the Greek-Spanish artist known as El Greco, and how his heavy strokes tell you that what you are looking at is one of El Greco's paintings, in whatever gallery you may see it.

So Peter is always Peter--whether in a state of nature or a state of grace, whether before or after he became a follower of Christ, whether during the days of his discipleship or the days of the founding of the Church, whether pulling in nets on the Sea of Galilee or with Christ in the desert place when he asked the disciples who he was, or listening to Christ talk with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, or sitting with Christ at the last supper, or even in his dreams.

You can't miss him or mistake him for any other.

No matter where you put Peter down, he will always speak and act like Peter.

Peter was probably between 30 and 40 years old when he became a follower of Jesus.

St. John gives us a graphic and detailed record of this.

It was on this occasion that Jesus gave Peter the name Cephas, a Syriac word which is the same as the Greek Petros and signifying a stone or rock. John 1:35-42.

This was not to denote what character he had then, but what our Lord perceived he was capable of becoming.

It was a prophecy of his future.

Although Peter became the first among the 12 Apostles, he developed a natural tendency to rashness and forwardness which bordered upon presumption.

Whenever he witnessed his faith and devotion, he displayed at the time, or immediately afterward, a more than usual deficiency in spiritual discernment and consistency.

At the last supper he made repeated claims of absolute fidelity, which were so soon to be falsified by his miserable fall.

But Peter, though humbled, was not crushed by his fall. He learned from his mistakes.

In John 21 we have the account of a full re-instatement into the place of an apostle.

In the Book of Acts, beginning with the selection of a successor to Judas and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter stands out as the recognized leader of the Apostles.

He became what his name signified, a rock-- and his boldness in the face of persecution formed a sharp contrast with his previous timidity.

He performed the first Christian miracle, and conducted the defence when the Christian leaders were brought before the Sanhedrin. When the gospel was first preached beyond the local precincts of Judea, he and John were at once sent by the apostles to confirm the converts at Samaria.

Perhaps the most outstanding event after the day of Pentecost was the baptism of Cornelius, by Peter.

Another significant event was the establishment of the Church at Antioch, largely Gentile in membership, in which Peter no doubt had a large part.

He was imprisoned and miraculously delivered from prison.

He was probably employed for the most part in building up and completing the organisation of Christian communities in Palestine and the adjoining districts.

He traveled about preaching the gospel, accompanied by his wife (I Cor 9:5).

The only written documents which Peter has left us are the First Epistle--about which no doubt has ever been entertained in the Church--and the Second Epistle, which has been a subject of controversy from the

early centuries of this era.

However, Mark wrote his Gospel under the teaching of Peter.

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I. A. 4.

PETER'S SWORD. "Then, Simon Peter having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear!"

Peter learned that there is a time when it is too late to draw a sword. And there is a time when it is too late to offer apologies, or too late to frame words of sympathy, too late to bring flowers, too late to shed tears, too late to whisper words of endearment. Who of us wants tears or dears or flowers after we are dead?

Who wants folks to draw swords for us-- after awhile?

PETER'S DENIAL

One of the most dramatic scenes in literature is that sketch of George Eliot's in Romola where the selfish and attractive young Greek, Ito Melema, confronted at the banquet by his foster father, Baldassare-- who had toiled and sacrificed for him and when they parted had given him the jewels with which to purchase his freedom from the pirates who held him a slave-- coldly said that he had never seen the man before, that he must be some poor lunatic.

That was a great scene.

But what can compare with the scene when Jesus and Peter met face to face?

All the angels who had been watching turned away their faces in sorrow when they heard Peter swear that he had never known Christ.

If we could have put our minds into the mind of Christ, perhaps this is what we would have heard him saying to himself: "Peter says he never knew me!"

Me, who called him that day by the Sea of Galilee;

me, who told him he would become a rock; me, whom, he confessed as the Son of God; me, whom he said he would never permit

to wash his feet,

me, whom, he said he would follow to prison and to death!"

I. A. 4. THE LOOK

The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word,
No gesture of reproach; the Heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
Their thunders that way: the forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was, none guess; for those
Who have seen

Wrongoed lovers loving through a death-pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
And Peter, from the height of blasphemy--
"I never knew this man"--did quail and fall
As knowing straight THAT GOD; and turned free
And went out speechless from the face of all,
And filled the silence, weeping bitterly.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1806-1861

I. A. 4. Jesus Looked, and Peter Wept

A little lad was watching the ~~male~~ ^{a rooster} of the species among the flock of chickens.

Suddenly the rooster flapped his wings and let forth a lusty crow.

The little lad called excitedly,

"Mother, Mother, the rooster spanked himself and cried."

There are some things about us humans that ought to cause us to spank ourselves--and cry. We ought not to punish ourselves when it is not appropriate or necessary to do so. But when we are morally guilty before God, man, and our own conscience, it is appropriate to inflict some kind of self-punishment and to weep ^{some} over our sins. It is right to feel guilty when we are guilty and irresponsible. * Whether there is much spanking or not these days, there is much crying.

~~Still~~ There is, as Dulac says, one cry of anguish which, like a pebble thrown over a precipice, reveals the depths of despair."

~~Still~~ There are cries which are like "the cry as wild as any coming of madness."

~~Still~~ We feel a kindred experience with those who say:

"My heart is crying like a tired child, For one fond look, one gentle, loving word."

The gentle loving look which Jesus gave Peter needed no words to convey its message of pain and love and understanding.

That is why Peter went out and wept bitterly.

* Dr. William Glasser says it is important not to minimize guilt when it is deserved.

WAITING FOR LUCK

Some people wait for luck to come along and change them into the sort of person they would like to become.

's not by luck, but by pluck that great changes come to character.

I deny that there is any such thing as luck.

I remember hearing about the man who saw a horseshoe in the road and picked it up and, as he did so, was hit by a car that tumbled him with fourteen broken bones into a field of four-leaf clovers!

I like to think that no circumstances and obstacles are stronger than I.

I like to affirm that in any environment and in the face of any obstacles, I can make them my servants--not my masters.

THE MELTING OF A HARD HEART

It takes a long time for some cold hearts to melt.

I understand that some icebergs have been known to take as long as 200 years to melt. And, judging from the warmth some humans possess as to spiritual realities, they will still be icebergs if the live to be 200!

Peter, Peter, save your skin,
Then ~~u~~ futile, weep your shame.
No one will notice. After all,
We have done the same.

Ada Jackson, Contemporary American.

III. B.

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One day there came along that silent shore,
While I my net was casting in the sea,
A Man who spoke as never man before.
I followed Him; new life began in me.
Mine was the boat,
But His the voice,
And His the call,
Yet mine the choice.

Ah! 'twas a fearful night out on the lake,
And all my skill availed not, at the helm,
Till Him asleep I waked. crving. "Take
thou the helm--lest water overwhelm!"
And His the boat,
And His the sea,
And His the peace
O'er all and me.

--George Macdonald, 1824-1905

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