

## **St. Peter the Apostle (June 29)**

### **Psalms: 22:23**

<sup>23</sup> Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.

<sup>24</sup> For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard.

<sup>25</sup> My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

<sup>26</sup> The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live forever.

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

<sup>28</sup> For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations.

<sup>29</sup> All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.

<sup>30</sup> A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

<sup>31</sup> They shall come and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

### **Psalms 67**

<sup>67</sup> God be merciful unto us and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah.

<sup>2</sup> That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.

<sup>3</sup> Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.

<sup>4</sup> O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth. Selah.

<sup>5</sup> Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.

<sup>6</sup> Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.

<sup>7</sup> God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.

### **First Lesson: Ezekiel 2:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.

<sup>2</sup> And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.

<sup>3</sup> And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day.

<sup>4</sup> For they are impudent children and stiff hearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God.

<sup>5</sup> And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them.

<sup>6</sup> And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house.

<sup>7</sup> And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious.

### **Second Lesson: St. Matthew 16:13-19**

<sup>13</sup> When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

<sup>14</sup> And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

<sup>15</sup> He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am?

<sup>16</sup> And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

<sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

<sup>18</sup> And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

<sup>19</sup> And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

## Introduction

Today we remember and celebrate the Feast of the Apostle, St. Peter, a foundational person in the history of the church. He was a saint, miracle worker, a missionary in spreading the gospel, a leader of the Apostles and in the early church and he died a martyr in his unwavering faith in Christ. Along with Paul, he is probably the most recognized and well known of those men who walked alongside our Lord. When I was a small boy, when we were visiting in England, my father brought me a book about the life of St. Peter. I remember reading it and thinking to myself that he was kind of a mess. Definitely, not the type of person I expected to be called into service by Jesus. He was often rash, impetuous, frightened and uncouth, all qualities that were contrary to the type of person I expected Jesus would call to be an Apostle. He was filled with human weakness and frailty, and even after being called into service, continued to “drop the ball” so to speak. His denial of Jesus (Mark 14:66-72) was a moment of profound failure cumulating out of fear and worry. But despite his rough start, He became the Apostle who Jesus chose to lead the Church. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells him, *"You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18-19). Jesus chose a flawed human to be a foundational figure, not because Peter was perfect, but for Christ's divine purpose and power in working through him. This paradox, of being a deeply flawed human being and yet chosen by Christ to be a disciple and carry on His message, should be comforting to all of us. Today, we prayed The Litany and asked God for deliverance from "blindness of heart, from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness,". We acknowledge our own proneness to such failings and know that we all “have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). As we commemorate St. Peter today, we will explore how his journey, marked by human weakness and divine grace, reveals the foundational truths of Christ's Church: that it is built not on perfect people, but on

Christ's empowering love, the grace He gives us to repent of our sins, and the strength He provides in order that we may serve Him by loving and serving others.

### Body

**(Matthew 16:13-19) Jesus asks His disciples who the people think he is. They respond with John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias or one of the prophets. Simon Peter answers quickly, and says “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Jesus answered and said unto him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”**

In our second lesson from the Gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus asking His disciples who the people think that He is. Remember earlier in the Gospel account, Peter and his brother Andrew were fishing, casting their nets into the sea. Jesus says to them, “*Follow me and I will make you fishers of men*” (Matt. 4:18-20). Peter did not hesitate and with a sense of zeal and alacrity, went to follow Jesus, leaving his nets behind. After witnessing and listening to the teaching of Jesus, along with witnessing Jesus’ healing and performing miracles, the disciples are asked who the people think Jesus is. They respond by saying that some think He is John the Baptist, or Elijah or another prophet. Peter does not hesitate and proclaims, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matt 16:16). Jesus answers Peter by proclaiming, “*Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven*” (v. 17). Peter understands who Jesus is. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the one whom God had promised to send to be Savior and Lord. He would save His people from their sins and would provide provision and protection as our Lord. He also understands that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, God Himself in human flesh. This is why the Pharisees sought to kill Him. When He called God His Father, He made Himself equal to God. How did Peter understand all of this? He did not look back at the past two years with Jesus, add up Jesus’ marvelous teachings and amazing miracles, and conclude who Jesus was. He did not ask the other disciples

or listen to what the people thought. God the Father had revealed it to Peter, even in that very moment. His knowledge was a gift from God. Peter did not just know this idea, as something to think about or dwell on, he knew that it was absolutely and unshakably true. Peter certainly had his doubts and failures over the course of his life, but he never again doubted who Jesus Christ was and is.

**(Matthew 16:18-19) Jesus tells Peter that “upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it”. The “rock” is the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Peter knew this and it is this belief and faith that the church is built upon. Jesus tells Peter that he will be given the keys to heaven.**

After Peter declared “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,*” Jesus says to him, “*That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” (v. 18). What does Jesus mean when he refers to Peter as the rock?

Theologians from the different branches of historical Christianity have interpreted this verse in diverse ways. The Roman Catholic church views St. Peter as the rock upon which the church is built while the orthodox church views the rock as St. Peter’s expression of faith, not Peter himself. As Anglicans, which are both (small c) catholic and orthodox, we recognize the foundational role of St. Peter, and his confession of faith, as building blocks of the early church.

The truth is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus says He will build His church on that truth. He is the Christ, the One whom God sent to be Savior and Lord. He is the Son of the Living God, God Himself in human flesh. It is HIS church; a church built on this truth and the faith of people in this truth.

Peter himself is like the first rock in God’s building. Jesus is the foundation and God’s building is the Church. Peter was the first person to declare that he believed in Jesus, and he became an important leader and teacher in the early Church. On the day of *Pentecost*, he was the

first to start preaching and over 3000 converts were made on that day. This faith is tremendously important for the endurance and perseverance of the early church. Christians were persecuted and killed for their beliefs, and it was this solid, unerring belief that kept them moving forward and bringing others into knowing Christ.

Jesus also tells Peter, *“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”* (v.19). At this point Jesus gives authority to Peter to act on His behalf. He has done this before in sending out the twelve to represent Him and minister to people in Israel (Matt. 10:5-15). Jesus will give this same authority to all twelve disciples both before and after His resurrection. Jesus describes the authority He is delegating to them as the *"keys to the kingdom of heaven."* He says that whatever they bind or loose on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. Only the most trusted servant in the household would be given the keys to the doors of the estate. In handing them over, the master of the house would be sharing His authority to open and close, to lock and unlock, the entrance to His home. Peter first, and eventually, the rest of the apostles, are being assigned a crucial role in introducing the gospel to the world. In Christ's name, they will declare He is the Messiah and that faith in Him is the only entrance into His kingdom. In His name, they will also exercise discipline within the church, setting the standard for both what is true and how that truth will be practiced.

### **Action**

Today as we celebrate St. Peter the Apostle and look at all he accomplished while in the world, we are reminded that he was not a perfect person by any means. From his initial call to follow Jesus (Matthew 4:18-20) to his bold declaration that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16), Peter remains faithful. Peter's miraculous escape from prison (Acts

12:1-11), and his apostleship with Paul who refers to him in his letter to the Galatians, are all fundamental building blocks of our understanding of faith. Jesus' final command to Peter is to "*feed my lambs*" and "*feed my sheep*" (John 21:15-19). He says this three times, and the message is clear. Jesus was commissioning Peter, and by extension, all believers, to care for and nurture His followers. This involves providing both spiritual nourishment through teaching and guidance, and practical care for their physical needs. It is about tending to the needs of the entire flock, both new and mature believers. Peter is given this task despite the fact that he was a profoundly flawed human, showed weakness and fear, was impulsive, and in a moment of failure born from fear, he denied three times that he knew Jesus at all (Mark 14:66-72). This was a profound moment, demonstrating God's radical forgiveness and renewed call despite grievous failure. The Absolution in our liturgies reminds us that God desires not the death of a sinner, but rather repentance and a new life. Our emphasis on confession and absolution mirrors the divine grace of forgiveness and restoration. We should all be comforted by this, as all of us have fallen short through things we have done or failed to do. Peter's story is not just about him, but about the nature of God's Church. It is a community of imperfect people, called and empowered by God. The church exists on God's grace, our repentance, His forgiveness, and new beginnings. The church exists to glorify God and to love and serve God's people.

As we think about St. Peter, I encourage you all to recognize your own "Peter moments," both in triumph and failure, and seek to embrace God's forgiveness, learn from your mistakes, and respond to Christ's call to "feed His sheep" in our daily lives. Serve God with courage and humility, trusting in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit to guide you along the way. The Bible is filled with accounts of God using imperfect people to accomplish His will and further His Church. We can serve the Lord and allow Him to do His will through us.

## **Conclusion**

It is on this feast day, the day we commemorate St. Peter the Apostle, that we remember his journey, marked by human weakness and divine grace, which revealed the foundational truths of Christ's church. His Church is not built through perfect, unfailing people, but on Christ's transforming love, the grace we all have to repent of our sins, and a commitment to take care of all the members of His universal church. Let us all remember that we have been given gifts from the Father, and we should continue to persevere despite our shortcomings and failures. Like Peter, we are all loved in the eyes of God. Let us continue to do all such things that glorify God in heaven.

In closing let us consider a sonnet-prayer from Malcolm Guite, an English poet, and Anglican priest that was based directly on John 21:15-17 and his direction to “feed my sheep.”

I stand like Peter, Lord amazed by grace,  
That I who have betrayed am called to love.  
That in the church you love I find a place,  
Restored in you, with nothing left to prove.  
More than a place, I am assigned a task.  
To share again the care, I have been given  
To meet another's needs before they ask.  
To nudge your flock towards the gates of heaven  
So, nurture me that I may nurture others  
And pastor me that I may pastor them  
Let me not scatter, but be one who gathers  
And bring to you all those who touch your hem  
Help me help them, simply as I am  
Like you, the Shepherd who is still the Lamb.

To the only wise God, Be glory, majesty, dominion and power, Now and Forever, Amen.



