

Devotion on Holy Week (Fourth Day - Wednesday before Easter) - 16 April 2014, Anno Domini (Proclaiming the Acceptable Year of the Lord)



Distance is fatal, let nothing come between you and the Lord, keep Him close to you.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. (Luke 22:31-36)

Many professing Christ as Lord separate themselves from His Love and Presence by the distance of an ignorance engendered by failure to diligently search the Scriptures. Communion with the Lord comes by prayer and Bible reading. Please do not tell me that you love the Lord with all your heart, mind and strength if you do not care enough to visit His counsel daily given in His Holy Word. That simply is not logical and you know it!

You will readily admit that Peter must have been a strong and manly fellow. He was a fisherman by trade. He was accustomed to fighting the tempest and gales of the sea; of drawing in catches of fish in large and cumbersome nets; of enduring long watches in the night in search of fish; and of rowing strenuously when the winds failed to fill his sails. Many events recorded in Scripture reveal Peter to have been a man of short temper but also of courage. No one would ever have labeled Peter a coward, for Christ called him a stone of faith. There were times when storms on the Sea of Galilee may have rattled Peter a bit, for the gales and billows of the sea were well beyond his ability to conquer. But Peter was a man of courage, and that courage only failed three times – all three times on the night of our Lord's betrayal. Why did Peter have such a lapse in courage? Why do any of us have such lapses of courage when we know to remain silent about moral issues makes cowards of us? Peter even dared to walk upon the sea, but sank when he took his eyes off the Lord.

I believe Peter, always the courageous disciple, lost his bravado and courage when he was parted from his Lord. Jesus had counseled the disciples to buy swords for their own personal protection the night of His betrayal. Peter had such a sword and was certainly not hesitant to use it that night of the confrontation in the Garden at Gethsemane. Immediately on Judas' betrayal of Jesus with a kiss, *"When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear."* (Luke 22:49-50) In the Gospel of St. John, we are told who the sword bearer was: *"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear."* (John 18:10) It would have taken uncommon courage for a single fellow to take on the whole host of soldiers who had come for Jesus. Peter had boldly proclaimed earlier the same night that he would go with Jesus to prison and even to death. *"I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death."* Why the lapse in courage later? Why do we often possess greater spiritual courage at times than at other times? Do we not often have a lapse in our devotional studies of the Word? This places a distance between us and our Lord.

So Jesus was taken in the Garden and ALL forsook Him. *"And they all forsook him, and fled."* (Mark 14:50) But Peter, at the very least, had the courage to follow from a distance. *"And Peter followed him afar off."* (Mark 14:54) When our love for the Lord wanes, and we fail to enjoy a close, daily communion with Him through Bible study and prayer, we are like Peter – following from afar. We separate ourselves from Christ when we fail to take His Word seriously – He never separates Himself from us. The guilt is ALWAYS our own! We are happy to let the world know that we profess Christ as long as there is no danger at hand. Separation from Christ makes moral midgets of all of us.

Please observe how Peter denies Jesus, as the Lord prophesied, three times in the night. *"And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, **Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.** And when he thought thereon, he wept."* (Mark 14:66-72) St. Luke adds a poignant detail omitted in the other Gospels of Peter's denials: *". . . while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, **Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.** And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."* (Luke 22:60-62) Can you even imagine the shame, hurt, and guilt that Peter felt in that look of Christ? He went out and wept bitterly, but that anguish of soul would continue for the next three days until the Lord's resurrection. Please understand that, though the Lord may be disappointed in our lack of courage, He also knows that we are weak and frail. He pardons our weaknesses and rewards our strengths.

Peter had been separated from his Lord. He no longer possessed the decisive and courageous character he had demonstrated in the Lord's presence. But after the resurrection, Peter never wavered or faltered. He had the Lord to be with him always in the Person of the Holy Ghost.

Unlike Judas, Peter repented of his denial of Christ with bitter tears. While the Angels of Heaven waited with baited breath for the glorious morning that would come on the First Day of the Week, Peter brooded over his denial of the best friend his soul could ever have. His face burned hot with shame as he re-lived that humiliating moment of failure for those three days – one day for each denial! Was the Lord aware, even in the Tomb, of Peter's grief and shame? Note the magnanimous grace shown by the Lord to Peter in the Angel's message to the women who came early to the Garden Tomb: *"And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you."* (Mark 16:5-7) Did you catch that, Friend? The Angel told the women to go and tell the disciples – **AND PETER!** I believe this specific reference to Peter by name was intended to alleviate his grief at his failure.

We may sink very low from failing to confess our Lord, yet He knows our heart; and He knows that we are as scared children at times. Though our failures are unforgiveable in the eyes of men, Our Lord has a heart so much larger than man's. His grace will always be sufficient for us if we return with a broken and contrite heart as did Peter.

Friend, we do not have the same excuse to fail that Peter had while separated from Christ. If we are true Christians, we are truly NEVER separated from Christ as long as we have the Holy Ghost to guide and direct us. He will bring to our remembrance all that is written in the Scriptures concerning Christ – and all Scripture concerns Christ for He is the WORD! If we lack strength and courage, it is because we have omitted our daily Bread of Heaven which is the Word of God. If you have neither read nor studied that Word, how can the Holy Ghost bring it to our remembrance? Have you fallen short of your duty that the love for Christ compels?