

GROUP RETREAT

REFLECTION

St Peter

A NEW LOOM
ORG



INTRODUCTION

St. Peter was a poor and unlearned fisherman, and was called by Jesus to be one of his permanent disciples. During Jesus' lifetime, St. Peter was with Jesus for several key moments, including the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Ten years after Jesus ascended into heaven, he went to Rome and for twenty-five years laboured with St. Paul building up the great Roman Church.

This resource includes three readings and reflections on things we can learn from St. Peter. Each can be used separately, or all three together to form a series during a retreat.

PRAYER

Almighty God,
whose blessed apostle Peter
glorified you in his death as in his life:
grant that your Church,
inspired by his teaching and example,
and made one by your Spirit,
may ever stand firm upon the one foundation,
Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

READING I

John 18 v1-26 (NRSV)

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

18 After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" ⁵ They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Jesus before the High Priest

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Peter Denies Jesus

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

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The High Priest Questions Jesus

¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said." ²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?" ²³ Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?" ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Peter Denies Jesus Again

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"

REFLECTION I

The art of risk taking

St. Peter was known for his rash responses.

In the reading from John we hear that Peter drew his sword and cut off the high priest's servant's ear (John 18:10). "Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its scabbard. Shall I not drink the cup that the Father gave me?" then Peter denies Jesus three times.

We, too, can emotionally respond to the situations in our lives – whether it is blowing up at our disobedient child, experiencing impatience at the self service checkout at the supermarket, or trying to make major life decisions without proper discernment. Slowing down and praying before acting can help us make better decisions. The good news is St. Peter eventually overcame his rashness to become the rock on which Jesus built his church. We, too, can overcome rashness to do great things (even if small) for God.

While acting rashly rarely leads to positive outcomes, acting out of faith makes all things possible. St. Peter's life illustrates this over and over again. Let's look at two famous examples. The first occurs when Jesus asks Peter to put his nets out into the deep. Upon catching a great mass of fish the Lord calls to Peter and his partners saying I will make you fishers of men.

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Peter's actions say it all, "When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him" (Luke 5:11). Shortly after, Jesus sends his disciples ahead. In the middle of the night, he comes to them walking on water. The apostles actually think Jesus is a ghost. When Jesus tries to calm their fears Peter says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." (Matthew 14:28). What happens next should amaze us if we let it. There in the cold darkness Peter places a foot over the edge of the boat. Close your eyes and picture it. First his foot hovers above the water and then slowly it descends. Perhaps it reels back at the first touch of the cold sea water. Then he puts his full weight down lifting himself clear of the boat. And then, all be it just for a few moments he stands straight and like his master walks on water.

Both of these actions may appear rash or at least risky on the surface, but Peter's life teaches us that it is ok to take a risk when God calls. Riskiness and rashness are not the same thing. God does not always ask us to play it safe. Peter's actions challenge us to ask ourselves what risk is God calling me to take? Is he asking me to give up my job so I can stay home with my children? Is God asking me to give more to the poor or my church? Am I called to take another job for less pay in order to devote more time to my family? Do I need to become a primary caregiver to a sick or aged parent? Should I give up my cushy job to explore ordination? Trusting God is a risk, but it is the only way we can become who we were made to be.

Let's take a moment of silence to reflect on those areas of our lives where we are rash and begin to think about opportunities for taking risks by trusting God's call.

READING 2

Matthew 16 v13-20

Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in

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heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

REFLECTION 2

Humility

Not many specific details of St. Peter's death are known. We do know that he was martyred by the order of Emperor Nero Augustus Caesar. Tradition has it that St. Peter was crucified upside down by his request. St. Peter didn't think he was worthy to be crucified in the same way as Jesus. Most of us will not be called to martyrdom in such humble submission to Our Lord's plan, but there are many examples of Peter's humility that directly inform our own life in the modern world. Humility is what kept Peter (even in spite of his rash personality) close to Jesus. He moved rashly forward at times, yes, but he also humbly submitted to the Master's correction and weathered Our Lord's rebukes with an openness to the love and growth that they offered.

In today's world, it is hard to be humble. Social media such as Facebook continually begs us to broadcast our accomplishments, blessings, and happy moments to our numerous friends and acquaintances. It entices us to see how many "likes" we can get on each post so everyone knows exactly what we are up at any given moment. We have the option of creating any image we want of ourselves and it's tempting to take advantage of this. We can photoshop our life to fit into a social model that is attractive, perfect, and enviable. This environment seems to intensify our natural desire to hide our flaws and imperfections (both external and internal). We must instead embrace the two truths that 1) this life is temporary and we are not made for this world; and 2) healing and growth come from acknowledging our wounds and flaws and letting God into those deep spaces of pain and sin. Humility is a dying to self. So, while we may not ever face crucifixion in the literal sense, we are called to die to our egos and our pride.

READING 3

1 Peter 3 v 8-22

Suffering for Doing Right

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For

“Those who desire life

and desire to see good days,

let them keep their tongues from evil

and their lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good;

let them seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,

and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

REFLECTION 3

Hope

Slap bang in the middle of that reading St. Peter wrote, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope” (1 Peter 3:15).

The world is full of news which can easily make us lose focus and hope. Continued war, heightened security, and the rising cost of living can easily make us lose trust in God. As Christians, we need to both search for and maintain peace in our own lives, so we can share the love of Christ with others as surely that love is the hope that Peter speaks of.

One way to maintain peace in your life is to make time every day for prayer. This is not easy. As a parent of small children, I know this is not easy. It seems our children are experts at knowing when we are praying and have an immediate need. But regular prayer really will help you to focus on what is important and regular prayer will renew your hope if it is lacking right now.

It is important to understand that there is no such thing as perfect prayer. You can even do it while bouncing a baby on your knee. You will have distractions. Your mind will wander but offering your time to God is still pleasing to him. Making time for prayer is vital to having hope. When I have hope, it is easier to be patient, joyful, gracious and kind... in a moment we'll have the chance to think about that some more during our personal reflection time but first let's sing again.

A BLESSING

Lord, as you rewarded Saint Peter for his strong and generous faith, sincere humility and burning love – Grant, that we may follow, in humility, with hope and with faithful risk taking the path you set out for each of us. And may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon us and remain with us always. Amen.