

see Christ from their boat, it is Peter who throws himself from the boat and swims to meet Him. An so the Gospel story goes on, nearly every page of it telling of some incident wherein Peter takes the lead, where he is the impulsive, tempestuous character that makes him so invariably lovable despite all his mistakes, because his fault are always so obviously not with his head but with his heart. Even when he blundered, his love of Christ was his excuse.

Peter was also a man of deep humility. In the boat, after the great catch of fish, recognizing the power of Christ, Peter exclaims, "Depart from me O Lord, for I am a sinful man." When Jesus, on the night before His Passion, washed the Apostles feet, it is Peter that tells Jesus will not wash his feet. When he is emphatically told that unless he allows Jesus to wash his feet that he would have no share in eternal life, Peter tells him to wash his hands and head as well.

After Christ's Ascension Peter is the undisputed leader of the Church. He takes the initiative in the election of Matthias to the Apostolic college. At Pentecost he explains to the curious crowd the meaning of the strange phenomena that accompanied the descent of the Holy Spirit. His cure of the lame beggar is the first recorded miracle of an Apostle. He took advantage of the occasion to preach within the Temple, and when he is arrested, along with John, he fearlessly defended himself before the Sanhedrin. He became so well known that people brought their sick on stretchers and placed them on the ground in the hope that his shadow would fall upon them as he passed. And when the Apostles were arrested, Peter again spoke in their defense. Once they were released on the advice of Gamaliel, they continued to preach the Good News, in spite of the fact that they were flogged as a warning. It was Peter who condemned Ananias and Sapphira in the name of the Church. Leaving James in charge of the local community, he visited the churches in Sumaria and Galilee, Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa. In Lydda he cured a paralytic, in Joppa he raised Tabitha from

the dead. In Caesarea he received the centurion Cornelius into the Church.

Peter founded the Church in Jerusalem; from there he went to Antioch. He preached through Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor. He transferred his bishopric to Rome around 42 AD and it is quite certain that he spent his last years in Rome. The first of the two of his epistles ascribed to him was written from "Babylon," a code name for Rome. It is, however, impossible to say how long he stayed there. He presided at the Council of Jerusalem around the year 50 or 51. Peter was martyred in Rome in the year 67 or 68 AD during the persecution of Nero by being crucified upside down. The earliest testimony to Peter's burial on Vatican Hill comes from the Roman priest Caius during the reign of Pope Zaphrynus who reigned from 199-217. His relics were discovered in 1942 are on display where they were found, in a niche in a wall 30 feet below the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. St. Peter is usually represented by one or two keys, symbolizing the receipt of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven from Christ and his Feast Day is celebrated on June 29th.

Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists

14818 Ranchero Road
Hesperia, California, USA
Telephone: 760-220-6818
FAX: 760-948-7620
E-mail: pjpiisoe@earthlink.net
www.pjpiisoe.org

Pamphlet 272

Saint Peter

Victor R. Claveau, MJ

Jesus began his ministry with a boldness that monopolized the history of the past, with a courage that challenged the present and with an audacity that defied the future. He presented his claim to a kingdom that would not be stopped by the frontier of space or be outstripped by the passing of time. His kingdom would be one of universal brotherhood of men and an eternal brotherhood of souls.

Both ideas were antagonistic to Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus proclaimed a kingdom, which everyone who hears of it must enter, a kingdom visible to all as if it were on a mountaintop.

His would be a kingdom whose call is scattered like seed upon barren and fruitful soil, and which shall bear both weeds and wheat until the final harvesting. His would be a kingdom as insignificant in its beginnings as a grain of mustard seed yet gigantic in its growth, sheltering all the races and peoples of the world. His would be a kingdom with a subtle but transforming influence, like the leaven that ferments the bread. His would be a kingdom that would be sought like a treasure buried in a field, a kingdom precious beyond compare, as a pearl of great price for which all else must be sold.

He Himself must not only be the Master but the motive for one's life — all this taught while He, the King, foretold His own betrayal, abandonment and infamous execution. This was no ordinary man, who by His words changed the world. Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

How did Jesus set about the realization of his ideal? Here again the wonder of God's ways is manifest. To be the rock on which the Church would stand ever unshaken by the powers of darkness; to be the holder of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; to be the prime shepherd of

his apostles; to be the judge whose decrees would be ratified by God; to be his witness before the world, his mouthpiece throughout the ages; to be the infallible teacher of his truth and the triumphant champion of his law; to be the living link that shall secure his kingdom's unity in space and preserve his identity in time; to effect all this, Christ, with divine disregard for human prudence and with divine recklessness, chose a man that was ignorant, dull, poor, timid, and impulsive, a mere commonplace fisherman who barely earned his daily bread with his boat and his net from the waters of the Galilean sea.

In the second year of his ministry, so St. Mark tells us: "He went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons: Simon whom he surnamed Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, whom he surnamed Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder; Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him" (Mark 3:13-16).

There is no more delightfully human figure among the Apostles of Christ than their prince. He was a strong man physically, a hearty lover of Christ, a real fighter upon occasion, impetuous and impulsive to a fault sometimes, human in his strength and his weakness. From the day his brother Andrew came to him and told him that he had seen the Messiah, he is the man of noble simplicity, he drops everything and follows Andrew to see Jesus.

At the beginning of His ministry to the world and before calling any Apostle, the Messiah, meeting Peter, the fisherman, said: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas [which means rock]" (John 1:42). It was the divine promise of a name with a divine meaning that carried with it a divine mission. On the spot, an alliance is sealed forever between the Savior and

the man He had destined to become His first vicar on earth.

There is no other human character in the Gospels that we know as well as Peter. From that first meeting with Christ, Peter had but one ambition and one aim in life, to be with the Master he loved so wholeheartedly. It is probably safe to say that wherever Christ went during the next three years Peter was at His side. And Jesus must have loved that man of hearty impulses, loved him even in his faults, which were not either few or trivial. The Gospels show us that Peter had a special place in the heart of Christ when Jesus gave Peter the Keys of the Kingdom and made him head of the Apostles. From their first meeting, Peter's masculine spirit attached itself to his Lord in a special fashion, and none of the other Apostles seemed to question at any time Peter's supremacy among them, even before Christ had officially inducted him into office as the head of the apostolic community.

Peter was born Simon son of Jona, a resident of Bethsaida on Lake Genesareth. Andrew was his brother and Philip came from the same town. There is almost nothing known of his early years, except that tradition tells us that he was married and living in Capharnaum at the time of Christ's public mission. He seems to have been a bit successful because he owned his own boat. It is estimated that he was about thirty years old when he met Christ.

Peter was a man of action and rather impulsive. He was the kind of person you would go to if you wanted something difficult done. As for his physical appearance, no authentic portrait has come down to us through the centuries. Ancient tradition shows him to be a man of medium height, well proportioned, broad shouldered, hardened by hard work. He had the hands of a workingman, gnarled, and calloused, and I suppose, on occasion torn and bleeding through his work at the oars and on the nets. He would have been well tanned by the sun. His eyes were dark with the fire of an impetuous man, with

crows-feet in the corners that the glare of the sun on water naturally produces. His hair was thick, and his beard curly, his features somewhat heavy, with a strong mouth and rather square jaw of the man of action and strength. Towards the end of his life, it is said that his eyes had lost much of their fire because of the many tears he shed over his denial of Christ, his hair had thinned and grown gray, his step had lost some of the youthful spring of his earlier days, but to the end he was a man to withstand physical effort, essentially one who got things done. Though the years left their passing on his body; though his face was lined and furrowed with the track of tears, as tradition says it was; mentally and spiritually, temperamentally, he remained the Peter who was always the first to speak and first to act. His impulsiveness remained to the day of his death. He was the sort of man who would speak or act, and then think it over afterward, often enough in deep regret. Peter was an honest man, he wore his heart on his sleeve; his sentiments constantly ran away with his judgment. Whenever he spoke, he fearlessly spoke what he thought.

It seems that the Gospels invariably depict Peter as a man of impulse. When Christ, for example, had spoken to the multitude on the lakeshore about the Blessed Sacrament, and they had left him because they found it a hard saying, Jesus asked the Apostles if they would leave Him too. It is, as always, Peter who speaks out. "Lord," he says, "to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." When Christ foretold that all the sheep will be scattered and the shepherds with them, that that same night all the Apostles would leave him, it is Peter who confidently stated that even if the others leave Jesus that he would not betray his Lord. When Jesus tells the Apostles of his forthcoming passion and death, it is Peter who tried in vain to get Jesus to change His mind and not go to Jerusalem. When Judas and the mob invade the garden to arrest Christ, it is Peter, who draws his sword and defends Jesus, only to be sharply rebuked for his effort. When the Apostles