

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



St Peter at the Tomb

All Souls Chapel Window (South side)

Holy Wednesday



Reading: Matthew 16: 13-25

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.' 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. 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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

John 21:15-17

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'

Commentary

There are a lot of stories about St Peter in the Gospels.

He was a fisherman, along with his brother Andrew, and was called by Christ in Galilee. He is first called Simon, then 'Peter' or 'Cephas,' which means 'rock,' which may indicate his tough, rough character. The Gospels tell us that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, though nothing is ever mentioned about Peter's wife and family.

Matthew in his Gospel recounts the story of how Peter, seeing Jesus walk on the water, tries to do the same and begins to sink when his faith wavers and the Lord has to catch him. Where is Peter's 'rock-like' faith?

At the Transfiguration, he is one of the three apostles chosen to accompany Jesus up the mountain. This 'inner circle' would also be close to Jesus as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, falling asleep when they were supposed to keep watch. The night before, at the Last Supper, Peter had initially refused to let Jesus wash his feet. Now, in the Garden, when Jesus is arrested, Peter takes a sword and cuts off the ear of the High Priest's servant. Later, he would deny that He was associated with Jesus three times.

In the Book of Acts, Peter and John are twice brought before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish court) and directly defied their ruling. After receiving a heavenly vision, in which God permits the eating of previously unclean animals, Peter becomes instrumental in evangelising the Gentiles. However, he wavered on whether Gentiles becoming

Christians should be circumcised and follow Jewish dietary rules so that he is confronted by St Paul over the matter.

Imprisoned by Herod Agrippa, Peter is rescued by an angel. Tradition has it that he went to Rome where he was crucified and buried in the place where the Basilica of St Peter now stands.

Peter is clearly a leader of the Twelve, a spokesman for the other apostles, and an influential figure in the early Church. Nonetheless, the Gospels portray a less than perfect character: wavering, uncertain, rash, impetuous, blundering, baffled and unsure as to the meaning of Jesus's teaching and purpose - and someone who even denied knowing Christ. Yet, it is St Peter's confession of faith in Christ upon which the Church is founded: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

'And' Jesus says, 'on this rock' – 'Peter'- 'I will build my church.'

On Easter morning, St John tells us of how Mary Magdalene discovers the stone rolled away from the Tomb and that she immediately told Simon Peter and the 'beloved disciple'. They ran to the tomb. Peter then goes into the tomb and sees the linen clothes and the tomb empty. This is the part of the Easter story that our window depicts.

In the final chapter of John's Gospel, the Risen Jesus 'revealed Himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee).' Peter goes fishing with the others, but they catch nothing all night until daybreak when Jesus, who is standing on the beach, directs them where to fish and then makes breakfast for them. After they had eaten, Jesus asks Peter three times: 'Simon, son of John, do you love me...?' balancing his threefold

denial of Christ, and three times Peter affirms His love for Jesus. It is a poignant act of forgiveness and reconciliation as well as vocation: Jesus said to him ‘Tend my sheep.’

Meditation

Imagine that you, like Peter, meet with the Risen Jesus.

How have you denied Christ in your life?

How do you feel when Jesus says your name and ask you three times if you love Him?

What is it like to receive the forgiveness of Christ?

When Jesus says to you ‘Tend my sheep’, care for my people, who comes to mind?

Prayer

Almighty Father, who in your great mercy gladdened the disciples with the sight of the risen Lord: give us such knowledge of his presence with us, that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life and serve you continually in righteousness and truth; through 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