

**SIMON PETER**

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## PREFACE

To attempt a study on Simon Peter under the guise of a religious meditation can seem to be useless or incomplete. We ourselves consider the present study to be incomplete; useless, no, because the goal we have set is to familiarize ourselves with the great one within the limits that are possible to us. We are not conducting a spiritual criticism. These are the meditations: we are studying the man and for contrast, together with Peter, we will admire always more the immaculate character of the Lord Jesus Christ. It would otherwise be difficult to speak of the man without seeming to be irreverent at times and for this reason we let the study of the little flaws give prominence to the big pictures, and it is the same for great characters. Simon Peter erred many times and had to be reprimanded; he denied the master and had to be forgiven. This is undeniable. But it is likewise true that Frederick the Great of Prussia, a man of iron who was the hero of the Seven Years War and the victor of many campaigns, fled at his first battle.

Therefore, we enter into this study of this great character with a trembling soul, hoping that it will succeed in bringing some soul to the feet of the Savior.

This has been our ideal.

G.Petrelli

## The Encounter

*“And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas”*( translated means Peter). (John 1:42)

*“But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus feet, saying, depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”*  
( Luke 5:8)

Peter did not go directly to Jesus nor did Jesus seek him directly. Between Jesus and Peter there was an intermediary, Andrew, who was also a fine man. Andrew found the master, followed him for one day, and he could not remain indifferent. He spoke of him to brother Simon who was perhaps more experienced and certainly no less ready than Andrew was. “We have found the Messiah” which translated means Christ. Simon followed Andrew and they went to Jesus. Then came the encounter: The coarse and outspoken fisherman found himself in the presence of the Messiah. Jesus looked deeply at Simon’s face; it was an investigative look, as if to call to view from that uncultured figure the best elements of his nature. Simon did not evade the look of Jesus; his frank and sincere face remained serene before that examination. Jesus saw two men in Simon; one impulsive, human and errant. The other generous, obedient and unshakeable. Jesus said to him: *“Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).”* *“Thou art*



*Simon*". Simon knew his name but not what he was. Jesus did not say to him "thou art called Simon", but "*thou art.*" In the name there was all his being. You are simply Simon, son of Jona. Here is your history up to today; there is nothing else of you worth recording. Son of your father. But it will not always be thus; there is something in the depths of your being that I see, and that I will bring to light. "*Thou shalt be called Cephas*" (which is translated Peter). In you there is the basis of a latent, notable character so as to permit that one day you will be called Peter.

When will this change take place? Jesus did not tell him. From Simon to Peter there is a road to travel; a road of preparation and discipline.

In those days, on one of the banks of the Sea of Galilee, there was situated a small town called Bethsaida, which was to occupy an important part in Evangelical history. Simon was from Bethsaida and he was a fisherman. The first encounter with Jesus came about because Andrew led his brother to Jesus. Now it was different: Jesus looked for Simon, and found him on the job. It was on the job that the Lord looked for many of his servants. Gideon, David, Elisha and others. And it was on the job that Simon was taken into service also, and it was in a remarkable moment of his life as a fisherman. Simon and his companions had worked the whole night without success. They were on the bank of the lake, tired and frustrated, washing their nets, when Jesus appeared to them. It is always at similar moments that Jesus comes

to us, after a long and thankless work in the way of the world when we are close to, if not already in discouragement. Jesus began by asking a favor of those men who had experienced a useless work, thus demonstrating to them that they could still do something and be of help. *“And He got into one of the boats which was Simon’s and asked him to put out a little way from the land. And He sat down and began teaching the people from the boat.”* In this way, the worker who was already tired and discouraged had his part in the work of the Master; he had been asked to put the boat out a little way from the land. There is always something that we can still do even when we have worked for a long time without success. After Jesus had spoken to the people, He turned to Peter and to the other fishermen: *“Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.”* He was asking for a new attempt at work, the same work in which there had been no success. *“Simon answered and said, Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as you say and let down the nets.”*

This answer sheds a great light on the character of Simon Peter. The first part of his answer is impulsive: *“Master, we worked...”* The second part is of one who is submissive and yielding. It is the strange contrast presented by certain characters who seem to be difficult but who are, perhaps, the best. Their first impulse is to be rebellious, but then, by the continual resurgence of noble tendencies that exist in them, they obey and condescend. Rugged and noble Simon; his arms were tired, but he did not deny Jesus’ request to put the boat

out into the water. At Jesus' second request, to let down the nets, Simon's rough frankness is revealed. It was almost as if he wanted to say; why fish if we have done so the whole night? But here is the point of study of Simon's character; almost sorry for and ashamed of his refusal and brusque observation, he added quickly: "*but I will do as you say and let down the nets.*" As You say, be it as You want. I will do it in Your regard. Simon did not believe the effort would be successful but he did not want to displease the One who asked. Simon had recently met Jesus and He was asking for something. How could Simon refuse? Simon's noble and generous character touches us. Even in his imperfection and roughness he makes us think, with love, of certain distinguished but misunderstood men, who, because of an impulsive nature, are often ready to demonstrate that they are less than gentle; however, before their bitterness can be manifested, they are sorry, they yield and sacrifice themselves. There are great, but misunderstood souls who pass through the world with no friends and with no success; but while the lips of these souls are pronouncing "no", they are suffering in the depth of their hearts, and they quickly let you read a "yes" which is tender and full of sacrifice.

And this makes us think of others who at first show a yielding and generous side. These people do not want to say a definite "no" from the beginning, but little by little, by means of little retreats, the conclusion is that you are left with a zero.

Simon obeyed Jesus; he obeyed for love, not because he expected any reward; however, his obedience was rewarded.

*“When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink.”*

At this point the incomplete character of Simon is revealed even more. We read:

*“But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!”*

That miraculous catch of fish was a two-fold revelation for Simon; it was a revelation of Jesus as a supernatural being, and of himself as a sinner. He is overcome by great reverence before that superior power. At the same time, his own conscience is invaded by terror and he quickly judges himself to be unworthy of that favor. It is always thus; a vision of the divine makes us displeased with ourselves. *“Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips...”* was the exclamation of Isaiah when he saw the vision of the throne of God.

*“I am a sinful man,”* cried Simon Peter, who in the presence of the Master whose power was being revealed to him, saw in a flash all his poor existence. *“I am a sinful man.”* The height of God and the abyss of sin.

These are the two expressions of comparison always present in souls who are struck by the heavenly light.

In truth, there is in Simon's exclamation, together with his personal humiliation and the consciousness of sin, a superstitious fear and a terror of God. He trembled at being close to Jesus and entreated Him to leave. But Jesus quickly reassured him; and remaining in the same place, said to him:

*"Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men."* *"Fear not;"* this is the assurance that the Lord Jesus hastens to give. It doesn't pay to preach and make promises to one who is trembling because of a perceived imminent danger. That is why Jesus gave that immediate assurance: *"Fear not."* And Simon and his companions, having brought the boats to shore, left everything and followed Him. There had been the disappointment of a laborious and thankless work, the manifestation of a superhuman power and the loving reassurance of safety. It was time to call these simple men closer. Simon and his companions had little to leave behind, but the little they had was very dear to them, because it was all they possessed. And they hastened to leave everything, experiencing their first separation from the goods of the world, in order to follow the One who, little by little, by teaching them, would make them fishers of men.

## The Extremes

*“...beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord save me. Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said to him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”*  
 (Matthew 14:30,31)

*“Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona..”*  
 (Matthew 16: 16,17)

*“But He turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me Satan...”*  
 (Matthew 16:23)

The scriptural passages that we have quoted project a beam of light on the character of Simon Peter and allow us to perceive the man at his best, and also in his weakness. It is noteworthy how great characters fall short just in the point where they believe themselves to be or are the strongest. Moses, the Meek One, failed precisely in meekness; Elijah the Tishbite, the courageous man of faith failed in courage. He was nearly desperate when he fled a day's journey into the desert, and at the end, having fallen under a juniper tree, he was invoking death.

These remarkable anomalies of distinguished men are not found only in the Scriptures. Not to mention others, Napoleon Bonaparte, the hero of many battles was known for his presence of mind and ability to see things

at a glance, even in the midst of gravest conditions. Yet it is described to us, that toward the declining of the day of Waterloo, Napoleon was almost crazy and did not have the strength to give a command or even to guide his horse. Let us be cautious, therefore, in judging men and things and remember that people who are experienced in understanding human characteristics are very slow in judging and almost never ready to condemn.

The episode described by the Evangelist Matthew in chapter 14:22,23 follows the greatest miracle accomplished by Jesus in Galilee; that is, the multiplication of bread. This miracle marks the beginning of the declining of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, and is also the occasion of a test of the character of the disciples. Jesus constrained the disciples to enter into the boat and to go to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away.

And He went up into a mountain apart to pray. At the same time, one of those violent and sudden storms peculiar to small seas or lakes arose and the disciples' ship, tossed by the waves, was in danger of sinking. But Jesus had not forgotten His own, and in the fourth watch of the night, He went to them, walking on the water. However, in this lapse of time, the faith of the disciples had undergone one of those shocks that present a serious challenge, which in time strengthen. Left alone, the disciples forgot the power and love of their Master and were trembling with fear; and when Jesus appeared



walking toward them, they did not recognize Him, and cried out saying that it was a spirit.

The immediate danger was so much that it made the disciples forget the superhuman power of their leader, and caused them not to recognize Jesus in that moment! The Lord Jesus reassured them saying: *“It is I; be not afraid.”*

And it was then, after the excitement of the miracle witnessed the day before, after battling the stormy waves, after seeing Jesus on the water, which they believed to be a ghost, and finally after having listened to the affectionate reassuring sound of the voice of Jesus that Simon Peter is revealed to us, in one of those outbursts of spontaneous and noble characters.

*“And Peter answered Him and said, Lord if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.”*

This expression by Peter has been judged too severely by some, and with excessive mildness by others: “This was not faith, but simple foolhardiness.” “His affection for Jesus pushed him to do so without reflection.” These are two different judgments. To us it seems that the proposal of Peter was neither all foolhardiness, nor only affection, and at any rate, it is difficult to separate one from the other and to know exactly where affection ends and foolhardiness begins.



We are human and in criticizing others we must not forget ourselves. The succession of excitements experienced by the disciples, from the miraculous multiplication of the loaves up to the moment of walking on the water had been, in part, the motive behind the impetus of Peter. In his proposal to the Master to walk on the water, there is the expression of various sentiments. To say that Peter doubted the identity of Jesus, the personage who had given the voice of assurance: "*It is I, be not afraid,*" would not be serious. After Jesus had spoken, if Peter had continued to think that He was a ghost or an evil spirit, he would not have risked the attempt to walk on water at the command of such a one, since doing so could have been fatal. Peter was the first one to recognize the Master, and in an impetus of almost infantile joy, without consideration of his capability, he hastened to speak to the Master, and asked for, not strictly a proof that it was He, but a demonstration of power.

They are the extremes of desperation and contentment. Shortly before, Peter and his companions were trembling, to the point of forgetting the Master of the day before, then in this moment, Peter was sure to the point of offering to walk on the stormy waves.

Take note, however, in credit to Simon Peter, that he asked for the command of the Lord. Such a thing, so he thought in that moment, such a thing could Jesus not command? And if He should want it, would he not also be able to walk on the water? We see enthusiasm,

gallantry, impetuosity and spontaneity. The Lord did not offer a negative, but said: "*Come.*" "*And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*"

But enthusiasm that is too quick and bubbly, if not governed by a long and strict discipline, is quick to fall. Peter was ready to jump into the water, but he was not yet strong enough to walk up to Jesus. The stormy waves were bellowing around him. In the first impulse of joy he did not consider them, and now that he was in the water, he contemplated the danger. "*But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid,*" or to be more correct in the interpretation, "observing that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid." First impulsiveness, then observation; and from observation to fear; and beginning to sink, he cried: "*Lord, save me.*" He had taken his eyes off the Lord, but not his heart, and above all, in the excitement of the danger he preserved his confidence in the love of Jesus. Peter turned to Him and made no attempt, as desperate as it might have been, but only cried: "*Lord, save me.*" It was a brief and eloquent prayer and it was effective because it was direct, with no preamble.

"*And immediately Jesus stretched forth His hand and caught him.*" Our Savior is always ready to work. After He caught him, he addressed him: "*O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*" **Note:** of little faith, not without faith. There was faith in the act of Peter, but it was not sufficiently strong, and it was overcome by fear.

It was not a faith trained in conflict, able to triumph. Simon was courageous and sure in the boat and as he entered the water, but fearful after he began to walk. It leads us to think of the disciple who later declared himself ready to follow the Master even to death, and then after various weaknesses, ended by denying Him. Such are the contrasts in the hearts of men, often even of the best.

In an episode closely related for readiness and weakness, Peter is in the other episode recorded by the same evangelist in Matthew 16: 13-23, when Jesus asked of His disciples: "*whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*" After having listened to the various opinions given of Him, He asked, "*But whom say ye that I am?*"

*"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* It was a prompt answer of the prompt disciple!

*"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona..."* The words were very satisfying to the ears of Peter. "*Blessed art thou*" – he saw himself targeted for a beatitude. "*Simon son of Barjona*"; Jesus still called him by the name by which He called him at their first encounter.

*"And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter" (rock), "and upon this rock" (faith) "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* Simon's faith was rewarded; it gained him a new name and the

assurance of the triumph of inspired faith which must be the basis of the Church of Christ.

But there is a but at this point that also marks a contrast in the life of the disciple Peter. Immediately after the conversation in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus began to speak openly of His death. All events were pressing toward Calvary.

*“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciples, how He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”*

It was time for Jesus to speak and for the disciples to listen to hear about the final program of that marvelous life, the conclusion of which was to be the crucifixion.

However, those pronouncements seemed too hard to the disciples, and until the end they were reluctant to accept the doctrine of Calvary. Rather, the more their enthusiasm toward the Master grew, the more it appeared unnatural that He should die, and die in the way that He was beginning to describe. Also on this occasion Simon Peter became the spokesman thinking that he expressed everyone's sentiments. On the other hand, the declaration given by Peter in Caesarea: *“Thou art the Christ”* was a declaration that had elicited a response from Jesus to Peter: *“Blessed art thou, Simon....”* This made Peter much more sure of himself and perhaps on this new occasion, he believed himself not only

authorized but duty-bound to do his part, perhaps as the oldest of the disciples.

And so, ready also this time, but with a different aim and with a different spirit, Peter hastened to speak.

*“Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee.”*

The behavior of Peter appears to us still more characteristic than that of the past; “...took Him aside”... “He began to rebuke Him.” Noble Peter, he could not bear the thought that any harm should come to his Lord; but at the same time, he is irreverent and too familiar in his behavior. In addition, his manner of proceeding seems to be in contrast with the declaration he had made: “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” Therefore the Christ, the Son of the living God did not know what He was saying. All that gloomy program of how He “*must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer...*”, was therefore, the senseless expression of one who is deluded. And not only does that promise of resurrection on the third day have no value, but it is not even listened to. Peter does not consider himself to be in the presence of a superior personage to whom he had paid homage, but of an almost inexperienced young man, whom he felt he had a right to admonish and counsel. “*Peter...began to rebuke Him.*” We can well imagine that the rough fisherman laid his hand too familiarly on Jesus’ back, almost as though he had become His tutor.

Peter needed a severe reprimand in order to learn to know himself, and above all not to have illusions. The fact that he had spoken first by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit did not give him any right to infallibility. Rather, because of pride and vanity, as happened on that occasion, he could become an instrument in the hands of the devil.

*“But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”*

In that sudden turning of Jesus, we read how Satanic the counsel of Peter was. It was, in conclusion, another serious form of temptation. It was as if Peter were saying: “You are the Son of God! Well then think of yourself, save yourself at any cost.”

*“Get thee behind me, Satan.”* They seem to be harsh words, but painfully necessary on an occasion in which He was being counseled by a beloved disciple to fail in the program of redemption, of which Calvary was an essential part. Reading together verses 17 and 23 of chapter 16 of St. Matthew it can be seen that the same individual can become an agent of the Holy Spirit or of the devil in a short space of time. In the 17<sup>th</sup> verse Jesus says: *“Blessed art thou, Simon...my father hath revealed it unto thee,”* and in the 23<sup>rd</sup> verse the same Jesus said to the same disciple, *“Get thee behind me Satan.”* Such a contrast brings us to heed the warning that we should not

trust in past blessings, but to be continually watchful that the tempter may not seduce us.

*“Get thee behind me, Satan.”* If we knew nothing more of Jesus and of Peter, and the Scriptures were to end at this point, judging by our human criteria, we would think that after the harsh reprimand that Jesus gave Peter they would separate from one another. We would think Jesus would no longer want to know anything about such a disciple, and that Peter would not want to follow such a Master. We would suppose that Jesus, being Himself followed by others, would declare the company of Peter dangerous, and that Peter would be grumbling, or even seeking to create a division in the group. We would think that Peter would seek to distance himself, saying to some more trusted one, at least to his brother: “let’s go, Andrew. This one has offended me.” We would think that the least he would have done would have been to go away from the company. But these would be judgments from the human point of view. It was not so. Having reproved the disciple, Jesus did not insist on further mortifying him. Peter was grieved, without being offended or rebelling. He bowed his head in affection and reverence. And, as it happens in characters in whom love has deep roots, a few moments passed and disciple and Master looked at each other tenderly, with benevolence on the one hand, and affectionate devotion on the other.



From the Mount of Transfiguration  
to the Payment of Tribute

*“ Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”*  
(Matthew 17:4)

*“...What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children or of strangers? Peter saith unto Him, of strangers. Jesus saith unto him.....Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, etc.”*  
(Matthew 17: 25-27)

“The transfiguration is one of those passages in the story of our Lord that an expositor would desire to pass in reverent silence.” Thus said an acute and studious scholar of the Scripture.

But our aim is not so much to examine exhaustively the cited texts as to study in them the character of Simon Peter, a character that is manifested to us always more distinct and precise, according to the various incidents in which he plays a part. He was, in fact, one of those men who do not know the profound art of simulation or dissimulation, who had not even learned to be patient and always followed the first impulses of his heart. With



such a temperament, his defects were very easily exposed; but we prefer the quick speaking of Peter, ill-advised but noble, to the prudent and perhaps evil silence of others. If Simon Peter needed to learn to be silent, others had to become more sincere and noble. This distinction seems important to us and we want to emphasize it, because we are not called to judge the errors, but to learn from the mistakes of others, in the same way that a mariner sees the reefs of the ocean on the map, and knows he should be cautious because of the shipwrecks and misfortunes that happened to others.

*“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spoke, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”* Simon Peter plays two parts in this narrative; he is called together with two other disciples up into a high mountain apart; he cannot remain silent in the face of the marvelous admonition. Why the Lord chose him with James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, as also elsewhere, with the same companions, He called him apart from the twelve, is a

theme that is not strictly connected to this meditation, and we leave it to others or to be treated at another time.

In order to better understand the attitude of Simon in the episode of the transfiguration, it is helpful to keep in mind the picture of the anticipated sufferings of which Jesus, with determined insistence, had previously mentioned. Peter loved Jesus, and he had not understood the cross; consequently perhaps he was not too disposed to see the Master suffer the continual bitter and evil controversies of His enemies, and endure human ingratitude. And in his noble soul, we suppose, for the sake of his Lord, he felt a sense of rebellion to that pilgrim life in the midst of evil and ungrateful men. This sentiment commonly exists even among the best who have not yet deeply understood the lesson of the Cross. The transfiguration was bringing a revolution in the heart of Peter, and the horror of the dark vision of the tragedy of Jerusalem only recently allayed was revived under another guise. Dazzled as he was, in the impetus of his joy, he poured out his proposal: *“Lord, it is good for us to be here.”*

A somewhat accurate examination of the words, without further comment, allows us to enter deeper into the heart of Peter. Judging in his usual way, that is, remaining at the consideration of the moment he said to Jesus, or according to the very expressive style of our translation, he motioned to Jesus almost as if to make us discover the gesture of Peter. As if the disciple were making a sign of special intelligence to the Lord, to make Him understand:

Eh! This is very good; take advantage of it, it is your moment! And in that hasty but always tender gesture, we can almost imagine a loving prayer and exhortation.

*“Lord, it is good for us to be here.”* Rather, to be closer to the thought expressed in the text: “It would be great to stay here.” Peter had been struck by the majesty of the scene, and immediately saw the outward (and beautiful) side of it without judging its hidden meaning. “It would be great to stay here.” It is the sudden expression of a passionate and thoughtless admirer. But, as we have observed about Peter’s character, at the first original and rough impulsiveness there followed quickly a sense of submission to the Master; in continuing to disclose his plan Peter places a condition in his words, *“If thou wilt.”* That which he continues to say is also a plan he considers to be wonderful, and that he would like to see carried out immediately, but he did not wish to continue speaking without restriction, and therefore he added... *“If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”* *“If thou wilt.”* We note on one hand the profound reverence for the Master, on the other the feverish desire, by which Peter would have liked, then and there, to devote himself to construction of altars, and having built them, to remain on the mount in ecstatic adoration.

Jesus did not answer. There are proposals that seem so extravagant and childish, that to enter into a discussion is useless. Therefore, it was not the case of a discussion with Peter to examine the two articles of his extremely

rapid program: let us stay here, let us build altars; nor the error of the second part: three altars, not one. The two figures of Moses and Elias seen under the luminous irradiation had a value for Simon that was almost, if not equal to Jesus. Therefore three altars; the creed was no longer unique. Consequently it was not advisable to answer Peter, and instead something happened that must have quickly calmed him and made him think.

*“While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them.”* And to be closer to the biblical thought we read thus: *“While he was talking nonsense.”* The words of Peter were empty, not a discourse; but they could have dangerous results, and therefore it was necessary to interrupt them. And as one scene made him become loquacious, another scene drew him to reflection and to silence. He had not yet finished speaking when a cloud overshadowed the marvelous personages that he was contemplating. This was necessary, first of all, to enable the disciple to listen. When the blinding vision disappeared, there came a voice: *“this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him.”*

The word of the Father that rendered testimony to Jesus and that was an admonition to Peter and to his companions James and John remains an admonition for everyone: Hear Jesus. *“And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.”*

So the works of Peter remained expressions of no value, and he must have understood it quickly, because he resumed with the Master and the other two on the descent from the mount toward the valley, where a multitude who had need of the work of Jesus was waiting for Him. It was an admonition to Peter and to everyone that Jesus was experiencing the hour of sacrifice and of testing, and that the hour of glorification had not yet arrived.

The words of Peter remain in the Holy Book, not to authorize us to make irreverent judgments on the disciple, but so that we may learn to know ourselves better.

We believe that at this point it is also useful to mention the brief conversation between Jesus and Peter concerning the payment of tribute: *“And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, yes. And when he was come into the house Jesus prevented him saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? Of their own children or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.”*

(Matthew 17: 24-27)

In this episode, following the transfiguration and preceding the teachings on humility, there are deeper lessons than appear at first sight. In addition, the incident reveals the extreme poverty in which Jesus lived, and demonstrates His desire to be submissive, even when he had the right to claim exemption. Those temple taxes were voluntary, but it is precisely in cases of voluntary submission that the meekness of great characters is revealed. However, our immediate objective is to study the part of Peter in the incident, because even in this brief episode there is a study of the character of Peter. Those who were collecting the tribute money went to Peter and asked: "*doth not your master pay tribute?*" Why did they speak to Peter and not to the other disciples? The answer is easy, if one considers how an alert and high-spirited man must have attracted everyone's attention to himself. From the study of the man, we can infer that he was quick to speak and as soon as he was apart from the Lord, he must have spoken of Him always with high enthusiasm. Now it was to this man who was making himself noticed because of his familiarity, that they directed the question that sounded almost like a reprimand: "*Doth not your master pay tribute?*" Does he not pay? As if to signify: others pay and he does not... your Master?

On the one hand Peter felt the pain of that observation, because in fact, they had not paid, and did not have the means to do so; and on the other hand, he did not find a

reasonable answer to deny that those who were asking had a right to the tax of the temple. "*Does he not pay?*" It was a question, that, besides, could appear to be a prelude to criticisms and bitter discussions on the part of those who were continually spying the movements of Jesus in order to find arguments of accusation or censure. Therefore, "*Does he not pay?*" with its implications brought forth from one who deeply venerated the Master, the very ready answer: "Yes." "*Does he not pay?*" "*Yes, he pays*", answered Peter, and he set out for home, gloomily meditating in his heart how he should tell the Master about the incident that had occurred to him, and at the same time desirous to speak of it to Him as soon as possible because of that "yes" so readily given. That "yes" signified an obligation that Peter desired to keep.

When Jesus saw Peter, He "*prevented him*", that is he spoke to him first. Other times the disciple had given his message and questions without delay as soon as he arrived near the Lord but not this time. He arrived in the house, and found it painful to speak almost as if he were waiting for an occasion to do so. The Lord understood everything and relieved him from the situation with a question that completely overturned the hasty but honest and affectionate "yes" of Peter. The gist of Jesus' question is this: "Must I pay the tax as a son?" and the answer of Peter can be expressed in one word: "No." In a short time Peter gave two answers, one contradicting the other. "Does your Master not pay?" – Yes – "Must I pay the tax as a son?" – No – and in both cases Peter appeared to be upright and sincere, but he had not yet



learned to depend much more on the Master and less on himself. If Peter had already learned to depend on the Master, he would have spared himself the conflict, which, at least for a moment, must have been very painful to him. He would have avoided the conflict if, at the question – reprimand, he had kept in mind that he was a disciple of One who knew what He must do, and if before answering, he realized that Jesus had reasons, even if he and others did not know them. But these distinctions come about following a long discipline, and, in imprudent characters, they follow great bitterness. This leads them to be cautious and to acquire a certain reserve, of which, not because of virtue but because of malice, these characters that are clever and closed possess too much.

But, let us say it in praise of the disciple. Peter was too submissive to everything and to everyone, so he could not easily be more cautious, and we must expect that many years will pass, if indeed the years do their work, to completely change him.

Jesus hastened to give a command to Peter, because by a special miracle, He would handle the problem of the request for taxes, demonstrating by this a great spirit of humility. Without showing resentment or assuming an attitude of self-respect, Jesus said: *“Go to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for thee and me.”* *“For thee and me.”* That is, it is I who cares



for you more than you can care for me. "*For thee and me.*" Jesus identified Himself with the poor and imprudent fishermen.

And Peter hastened to obey, perhaps believing in his heart that he finally understood the Master; and Peter set out well assured that the promise of the Lord, in which he had great confidence, would not fail him.

### The Obstinate One and the One Too Sure of Himself

*“Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.”*  
(John 13: 6-9)

*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.”*  
(Luke 22: 31-34)

Obstinacy and excessive self-assurance are defects that often obscure even the best characters and, in the present meditation of the passages above, the figure of Simon Peter appears to us one time as being obstinate, and another time as being too sure of himself. The obstinacy shown in the first passage ends in the opposite excess of offering himself for that which was not necessary; the excessive sureness boasted on the other occasion has the

fearful act of the denial as an epilogue. May the Lord help us to make brief and clear considerations.

The episode relative to Jesus washing the feet of the disciples would in itself be worthy of an attentive study, but we will say only as much as necessary for the scope of our examination of the character of Peter.

In that last supper, so rich in affectionate remembrances, Jesus desired to leave also a remembrance of tender significance to His disciples, among whom there often arose a controversy of who would have preeminence in the Kingdom of Heaven. *“He ariseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”* It was a tender and compassionate disposition in the One who instead of leaving our stains exposed, is ready to wash them in his continuous work of sanctification. It is easy to imagine what the impression of the disciples might have been at that sight; on one hand they were observing, more every day, the great distance that separated them from their Master; on the other hand they were seeing Him in such a humble attitude carrying out the lowest service which only slaves were obliged to do. And as that silent scene was unfolding, they had the opportunity to measure the voluntary abasement of Jesus, compared to their immeasurable pride of preeminence of one over the other.

Whatever their stupor may have been, they were silently reverent before the One who even though He lived in intimacy with them, had always been above them, so that the disciples never attained an absolute familiarity with Him. But there was one among them who had not yet learned the patience and virtue of waiting silently, for explanation in due time, of events not understood. And this was our Simon Peter.

When Peter saw Jesus on His knees doing that menial service, he experienced a sense of rebellion and repugnance that extended to a condemnation for the disciples, since they had passively allowed Jesus to perform that menial service. Whatever the attitude of his companions may have been and even though some of them may have already passively allowed Jesus to complete that operation, and even if all the others were disposed to keep silence, he would never remain silent. Therefore, he awaited his turn impatiently. And as Jesus came to him, Simon Peter spoke in that expressive and dramatic manner that was so particular to him. "*Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*" These few words say much, and reveal in depth what an abyss had been excavated in the soul of the fisherman by the attitude of Jesus. "Thou", in that "Thou", in the manner expressed, there is the recognition of a personage so superior; washing feet, that Peter marvels that such a personage performs so humble an act. "*Dost thou wash feet?*" and "*dost thou wash the feet to me*", is not enough, "*Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*" Such a Lord performed that service, and for a man like Simon.

The rough fisherman thought, spoke and reacted in one sense only. This is too much. No matter who permits it, I cannot.

Was there room for criticism in Peter's denial? Perhaps not, at least considering the circumstances and the quite incomplete development of the man. Peter had not yet learned to submit blindly to that which could appear unreasonable or degrading. If Peter had understood from His words and works that Jesus had come to serve and not to be served; if Peter had learned to know what power of human redemption there was in the humiliation of the Christ, which had to culminate in the agony of Calvary; if Peter had been able to read where he could have given more weight to the continuous teachings of Jesus; if Peter already appreciated Jesus and His mission, we are sure he would not have voiced the least objection to the fact that Jesus was preparing Himself to wash his feet. He certainly would have demonstrated the highest devotion by doing nothing. But Peter had not yet understood the philosophy of the humiliation of Christ, and it seems that every time that Jesus mentioned it he would refuse, in his heart, to follow that line of thought. Therefore, were the other disciples silent because they had accepted such a philosophy? Oh no, even they had not understood the Cross. Their silence was not an index, neither of greater development, nor of greater virtue; if anything, it might possibly be a sign of greater prudence. The whole of the events explains it to us.

The Lord Jesus was not displeased by the attitude and words of Peter, and lovingly, with patience, added: *“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”* As if to say to him: let me act at this moment; don’t interrupt. If you don’t understand, you will understand later, and all will seem reasonable to you. And it is this *“later”* that many do not want to understand, and Simon Peter was one of those.

“You will understand later.” But what “later”? What must I know, thought Peter; and, rather than bowing his head and yielding to the sweet admonition of the Master and obeying even where it was irksome to him, he replied: *“Thou shalt never wash my feet.”* These words go much beyond the first expression, and if they don’t sound absolutely irreverent, as it seems to many, they are at any rate the expression of a character who not only was not used to deliberation, but was not content to put off to another time the explanation of that which he did not understand. The Master said that Peter would understand later and that should have been enough and should not have precipitated Peter to a second negative which was much more vigorous than the first. Peter’s second statement can’t be compared to the first, because on the first occasion Simon shows stupor, and his words are somewhat interrogative rather than of direct refusal: *“Lord, dost thou wash my feet?”* But Peter’s second statement expresses a direct, vigorous refusal that neither allows discussion, nor does it explain. Rather, it seems that Peter did not even hear the words of Jesus. *“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”*

Rather, after his first interrogation in stupor, Peter continued to strengthen in his soul the desire to show a more vigorous refusal, and therefore the statement: *"Thou shalt never wash my feet."* But with the changing of Peter's language, that of Jesus also changed, and rather than trying to explain to Peter then and there, Jesus said: *"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."* These words had an immediate effect. Jesus would have passed on and Peter would have nothing more to do with Him. It would have been liberty for Peter, but at the same time he would be shut out from any communion with Jesus. The reaction on the impetuous character of the disciple was immediate and transcended the action, and Peter hastened to say: *"Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."* Behold the man of extremes: First, nothing, and then more than what Jesus had requested. The Lord Jesus said to him, *"He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit..."* These words show the constant care of the daily life of one who has been justified in the Lord Jesus Christ. The scripture speaks of two washings; a general one that happens one time, and a partial continual one and uses two different verbs for each washing. But we will place a period on the study of this episode and we will pass on to another side of the character of Simon Peter.

*"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat."* (Luke 22:31)

Take notice of the emphatic introduction: Jesus called two times with the old name of the disciple: Simon,



behold. Three words were enough to attract all of Peter's attention. As if to say, "I'm speaking to you, Simon, especially to you. Be attentive, because what I have to say to you is important." "*Behold, Satan hath desired (has decided) to sift you (not only you but everyone), that he may sift you as wheat.*" Therefore, be careful. It seemed that Jesus was saying that they were close to a tremendous trial, on the part of an enemy that cannot be trifled with. Sift you as wheat. Shake you in every sense to see what will remain of you, "*But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" The Lord Jesus was warning Peter that he was exposed to the gravest danger, as such it was to be sifted by Satan, to lay bare all his weaknesses, and that if he were sifted without any help at all he would certainly perish. However, with the announcement of the danger He gave also the assurance, "*I have prayed for thee*". I have already prayed, before you go through the hour of temptation, so that your faith will not fail. The trial will come about; but because of the prayer of the great Intercessor your faith will not fail. "*And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" "*When thou art converted.*" Therefore, Peter was not yet converted. One day he would be. When thou art converted, strengthen the others, mindful of your own weaknesses.

That was an important, serious warning to Peter, and directed at him in such an incisive and yet loving way as to compel him to the most profound meditation and vigilance. And the manner in which it was given tells us



that the Lord knew that it was not easy for Simon to give ear to the warning and to put himself on guard against the attacks of an enemy much stronger than he.

But all that tender solicitude of the Lord Jesus was annoying to a man who was too sure of himself. Simon conducted a rapid self-examination; he understood only in part the allusion of the Master warning him of a trial when Jesus would be given into the hands of enemies. Peter loved Jesus, and besides he was a fearless man and ready for sacrifices. He had followed Him up to that moment, therefore he would not fail Him up to the end. If others abandoned Him, he would not. There was no doubt. And how could he fail, when he had already proved himself at other times to be ready and faithful. Did Peter perhaps not remember that tender appeal of the Lord after a memorable discourse, when the multitude abandoned Jesus, He turned to the twelve asking if they also wanted to go away? And it had been precisely he, Peter himself who answered that they did not want to go away because they had no one to whom to go. Peter remembered all that, and was sure of himself, not understanding that the imminent case would be quite different because the Master was still with them then, and shortly Jesus would be taken away from them. It would be a very hard trial and truly quite different. Peter had neither measured the extent of the danger, nor did he know himself. These are the most common and the most

dangerous errors. Slight importance to the danger and much trust in ourselves. These two errors are the cause of many falls.

That man had scornful words for the danger and he regarded the warning of Jesus with indifference.

Satan, who was Satan, after all to conquer the firmness of Peter? And, strong in himself, Peter answered thus:

*“Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and to death.”* **I**. Peter was putting his **“I”** at the head of all those promises of heroism and of abnegation – *“Lord, I...”* – And the answer of Jesus is also emphatic: *“I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.”* To the sure **I** of Peter there followed the aware **I** of the Lord Jesus, pronounced so much more strongly in that He saw that this boldness would cause Peter to land easily into the hands of the tempter.

It was fortunate for Peter that he had a great Intercessor. Jesus looked into the depths of that soul and appraised its notable virtues. Jesus discovered the hidden merits and prayed for Peter, as He prays for each one who believes and trusts in Him. Now Peter’s error of trusting in himself too much warns us not to depend too much on our own strength, but to put at the head of our plans not our **“I”** but the help of the Lord. Without the help of the Lord all the strongest promises of **“I”** would be translated into the most serious failure and bitter disillusionment.

### From Sleep to Violence

*“He...saith unto Peter; What, could you not watch with me one hour? (Matthew 26:40).*

*“Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.” (John 18:10).*

*“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.”*

*“And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”*

We cannot accompany Jesus in that intimate prayer; it is given to us only to refer to the biblical words, and to remember that it was here that He won the definitive battle. Three men had the privilege to accompany Him to a place more set apart, but even the three remained a little behind, because He went a little farther and fell on His face to pray. To the three disciples Jesus directed a tender exhortation, almost a prayer: *“tarry ye here, and watch with me.”* That was a sad hour, and the nearness

of three affectionate persons pleased Jesus. It is perhaps the only time that he asked for and had so much need for tender company: "*tarry ye here, and watch with me.*" If, from the whole of the dark picture we can guess the attitude of Jesus, we could in the words directed to the disciples, "*tarry ye here, watch with me,*" hear the profound intonation of His grieving soul, which must have possessed a note so tender as to move the three affectionate disciples, and induce them to share attentively with Jesus that gray hour of battle with the powers of darkness.

Jesus had not asked for much, only that they would watch with Him – "*watch with me.*" We can therefore imagine what the attitude of the disciples should be; a request so intimate of need of tender sympathy from One who was praying painfully a few steps away. We would expect that the three in reverent silence, close to one another, with baited breath, would also feel the battle of the Lord. They could not do anything else, at least they would remain vigilant in the place of love and duty. We would expect it to happen thus and we would be right. To be silent about two of those disciples, who also were very devoted to Jesus, one of the three was Peter, who was always ready and high-spirited. Only a few moments before, Peter said to the Master that he would go to prison and to death with Him. What was "*watch with me*" for one who had such a determination for complete sacrifice? Only to watch? It was too little. And Peter, at least, would remain anxiously in that place, perhaps standing, twisting his hands nervously, with a hiccup

restrained in his throat and with a heart about to break. He would remain there ready to run close to the Lord, to comfort Him if necessary, and say to Him: "Lord, I share with you the sadness of this hour." Is it not perhaps reasonable to suppose all this of Peter, whose affection toward Jesus we have seen to be sincere?

It is reasonable, but it did not happen as it seemed reasonable to have happened. James and John and even the heroic Peter did not feel the intimate sense of the words of the Lord, "*Watch with me.*" And all three, while Jesus fell on His face in that prayer that has been called agony, yielded to sleep, and all three, seeking the most comfortable position that the place permitted, lay down to sleep. They were sleeping while a few steps away there was a man who seemed to be dying because of intense pain and intimate tragedy of His heart. That martyr was the hero and the friend of those three, who had left Him alone. How can we explain all this which seems to be incredible and yet it is a fact? Were the disciples tired, and, if by chance it were so, were they more tired than the Master?

No, it cannot be that they should be more tired than the Master. Weren't they used to vigils? Oh yes, they were used to them, and if we remember, when Jesus met those disciples on the lake, they had worked and watched all night, and were still intent on working. They were neither so tired, nor was that vigil so prolonged and unusual as to aggravate them with sleep. But then how do we explain it? To watch quietly and reverently is not

easy, and it is not pleasant to watch one who is suffering. Pain isolates people, and only intense love can cause a diligent vigil. Mothers stand vigil at the bedside of their sick children. Sleep disappears from one who has a desire to cry, and, if for a moment one yields to excessive tiredness and dozes off, a nervous shaking stirs all the members and the eyes reopen to the present reality. But such love is not common, nor is it felt by us toward everyone. The devotion of friendship is limited; alas, too limited. Some action may be taken, possibly heroism in words, but to keep watch like a sentinel is not easy, not even when one is not very tired, because a long discipline of love together with patience is needed. Also there must be an irresistible affection that attracts us to the person for whom we are keeping watch, such as to make us foresee the needs of the one we love. And the disciples of Jesus, not excluding Peter, had not yet learned the secret of keeping watch; not for a long time, and not even for a short time.

Jesus returned to the place where He had left His three friends. If we are to judge in a human way, He expected the three sentinels to come as a single man to quickly and tenderly surround Him; if not with words, to comfort Him with gestures and expressions. It is sweet to think that while someone is suffering, someone is keeping watch for him. And yet, we read: "*and he cometh to the disciples, and findeth them asleep.*" And that sleep, as could be seen, was deep, because no one of the three observed that the Master was coming near them. What Jesus must have felt at such a sight is impossible to

describe. We have an idea from His words. And Jesus awakened the disciples, and said to Peter: "*What could ye not watch with me one hour?*" All three had not stayed awake, but it is specifically to Peter that Jesus turned, as if to remind him of his grandiose promises of heroism a few hours before, as if saying to him, this is how it starts; you have not been able to stay awake, not even this, to be a little vigilant, even one hour, denoting the brevity of the time of the test. A vigil of one hour is not long, and everyone can remain vigilant, all it takes is a little good will. Not even one hour with Me? So little; you did not know how to do it for Me. Who can understand, in all its extension, the value of that "*with me?*" In that "*with me*" there was the whole tender story of loving care and of affectionate teachings during three years of a life together. After so much love, here they are asleep. "*Not one hour with me.*"

We know the words, but not the accent, of the One who pronounced them and those words must have been enough to shake Peter and take away from him the sleep of many future nights. But none of the disciples protested and neither did Peter; rather, later he was found asleep with the other two, so that Jesus said to them: "*Sleep on now and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*"

Peter will rehabilitate himself later, or so he must have thought, and will demonstrate to the Master that he really



loves Him. Perhaps he thought that if he had not stayed awake, after all, that was not of any importance; but at the first opportunity he will show Him what his devotion and gratitude are capable of. Thus the extreme characters were thinking, overcome by laziness in one moment, by violence later. The lifeless and somnolent one of the quiet hour shines like a violent hero in the noisy scene that follows.

*“Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Jesus said, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground. Then he asked them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way... Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.”*

Sleep fled in the face of the noisy spectacle that disturbed the solemn quiet of the garden of Gethsemane, and as sleep left him, Peter returned to be the old, thoughtless man.

*“Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant.”* Why did Peter have recourse to this act? To defend the Master? It is certain that such a desire was in him. But what defense could be offered

to oppose a band of armed men? And then, why have recourse to violence, when the Lord was voluntarily putting Himself in the hands of the enemies? And had not Jesus, many times, persevered in saying that He would be delivered to be crucified? And in addition, had not Jesus right then shown to the disciples a superhuman power in that when He answered, "*I am he*" to those who came to arrest Him they fell to the ground? Could the sword of Peter be more efficacious than the power of that "*I am he*" of Jesus?

Was Peter thinking of defending himself? No, because the one who was sought was Jesus, and Peter could have fled rather than exposing himself uselessly to greater danger. What therefore led him to that act which was manifestly contrary to all the teachings of the Master, and to every counsel of prudence and reason?

Peter did not think of himself and it is certain he did not hope to succeed in saving the Master. But it is likewise true that these reflections of ours were not being followed by the quick-tempered disciple. Perhaps, in his mind, it was all a confusion. He was thoughtless in the scene of the moment, perhaps reflecting on that which had happened a short time before, and he was so unequal to the present situation he was regretting a past opportunity. He was then king of the sleep for which he had drawn that melancholy admonition of the Lord, and while he was meditating on that, he lost the reality of the current situation and did not see that Jesus was surrendering voluntarily. He did not observe the overwhelming

number of enemies and did not pay attention to the very inadequate means for resisting. And, so, one can say, by a movement more mechanical than decided by reason, he resorted to an act of violence.

Peter had to do something. He had slept before, but he could act now, and against the first one who came in his path. Worthy of consideration are the words of the Gospel "*Simon Peter having a sword drew it.*"

It was the sword that remembered Peter, and not Peter who remembered the sword, or to be more precise, Peter was used by the sword, more so than the sword by Peter. In that act which was semiconscious, semi-affectionate and semi-violent the image of that singular character is shown more clearly than elsewhere, yet Peter was capable of great things. Almost always reproved, always making mistakes, did Peter feel that he was making a mistake even then? We think not, because he lacked the power of cold reflection, and had followed the opportune teachings relative to the final tragedy less than his own thoughts. In that extreme moment Peter was neither enough Simon, in order to make him act like Simon who would have acted without knowing Jesus, nor was he enough of the disciple in order to make him act according to the teachings of Jesus. And so Peter erred that time also, and the word of the Master told him so immediately, "*Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*"

And Peter's fury dissipated, and he realized the situation. Jesus was bound. And the disciples, leaving Him, ran away.

St. Mark says: "*They all forsook him, and fled.*" Did Peter also flee? Yes and no, because we read in St. John that Peter and John were following Jesus from a distance. He did not flee enough to be called a fugitive, nor did he follow Him closely enough to remain faithful to Him. The contrast will continue until the end which makes the man remarkable, but if we wish to render justice, thoroughly examining ourselves, the contrast lets us see in him the notable sides of his nature, by which one day we will call him a great apostle.

Meanwhile, you, oh reader, if you are not one of those who expects virtues from others of which they are not capable, you will refrain from criticizing them severely, knowing that many, like Peter, by way of trials and failures, are led into the great ascension toward the Son of God.

### The Vigilance of Satan

*“And they all forsook him, and fled.”* (Mark 14:50)

*“And Peter followed afar off.”* (Luke 22:54)

*“But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.”*  
(John 18:16)

*“And a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, this fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied it with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”* (Matthew 26: 69-75)

“You have all the vices of Silla without possessing his virtues”, the fierce but intelligent emperor Tiberius observed one day to his nephew Gaius Caligula. The nephew had just criticized the fierceness of Silla. All the

vices of Silla without his virtues! Be careful, dear reader. We could possess all the defects of Simon Peter, without his virtues! And with this precaution we begin to contemplate with trepidation the final scene of Peter's descent that brought him to deny the Master with cursing and swearing.

Peter fled and followed the Master from afar. When he saw the Master bound, and gauged the serious and imminent danger, he took to flight. Meanwhile, the hired ruffians were taking Jesus away; however at a certain point, Peter stopped, turned to look and saw the lit torches of the nocturnal company a few hundred paces from him moving rapidly toward the center of Jerusalem. Peter repented of his flight, retraced his steps almost running and found himself once again in the vicinity of the company, but not close enough to compromise himself.

At a distance Peter's confidence was renewed and he returned to following, always maintaining, however, a distance. Overcome by fear one moment and full of shame immediately afterward, Peter realized his inability to save the Master, and at the same time he remembered his grandiose promise to follow Him to prison and to death. Alternately courageous and cowardly, one foot fled toward the mountains, and the other kept him after the Lord. Agitated and moved like this, Peter arrived in front of the palace of the High Priest, where the troop had already led Jesus. Peter did not attempt to enter, nor did he go away; he remained outside near the door, with his

back against the wall. Grasping a shade of meaning in the expression of the scripture, Peter placed himself near the door, almost nailed between the pavement and the wall in that place that was near the scene of the great humiliation that the Lord was undergoing. In this posture Peter remained like one who is senseless, more like a motionless statue than giving any sign of determination, when a young man who knew him well, and who was somewhat familiar with the servants of the house of the High Priest, went out and saw Peter. John had entered into the courtyard; for a time he had run with Peter, and then they had lost sight of each other. John had entered and looked for his companion without finding him. He went out and saw him in front of the door and let Peter enter. Then the two disciples lost each other again, each one seeking different groups.

The sergeants had lit a fire in the courtyard. Peter sat down with them in order to witness the end, and in the meantime he was warming himself near the fire. While the Master was suffering the saddest and most shameful hour of insults, sneering and mockery, Peter trembling with the cold and fear, inconspicuous with the enemies of Jesus remained a passive spectator. But Peter could not remain unobserved for long. In vain he mingled among the enemies, because, in spite of the noise of the sergeants Peter did not succeed in hiding himself well enough. His attitude was awkward and uncertain in the midst of the vulgar language and the roaring laughter of the ruffians, and the less than gentle epithets aimed at the great Martyr. The language and attitude of Peter was



neither that of a friend nor an enemy of Jesus. Perhaps even Peter tried to laugh with the others, but his laughter died in his face, translating itself into a bitter expression. It was a painful situation that placed Peter in conflict between his conscience and the scoffers of the Master. At a certain point Peter's attitude was noticed. There is always someone who observes. Even in the midst of the most deafening confusion there is someone who observes, and studies our person and our movements.

*“And a damsel came unto him”*, almost as if to better observe him saying; *“Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.”* As if to say to him: you have not been one of ours, of the friends of this house, of those faithful to our authority. *“Thou also wast with him”*- it is understood *“wast”*, because now He is a finished man. It seemed that the language, even without the questioner meaning it that way, reproved Peter for having seated himself at that fire, where only the faithful ones could sit. *“Thou wast with Jesus of Galilee.”*

Peter was not prepared for that; the statement took him by surprise, and, in the surprise, he followed the impulse to save himself and he denied. *“But he denied before them all.”* He denied, and the denial was known to everyone, almost like a challenge that no one could contradict. He did not stop at denying, but added: *“I know not what thou sayest.”* I don't understand you; words that sound like a wearisome repetition of the denial, and attempt to strengthen it; *“I know not what thou sayest”* – or perhaps the words are the echo of the

violence that Peter had done to his heart, and almost as if to alleviate the great error, he added "*I don't understand you.*"

And the fisherman continued to remain in the same group, leaving and returning close to the enemy fire that could not take away the shivering from him which was caused more by the sorrowful tremors of his conscience than by the cold of the night. Perhaps Peter was already beginning to gauge all of his lack of prudence and how little he had known himself in attempting to follow the Master. Perhaps he was thinking again of the promises he had made: "*I am ready to go with Thee both into prison, and to death.*" Peter was still bitterly meditating on that denial when another accuser came to him.

*"Another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth."*

This was no longer the direct appeal of the first damsel: "*Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.*" That statement up to a certain point, could sound like interrogation, and it was considered to mean this; but now there was an accusing expression that indicated to the sergeants that there was an enemy in their midst. The accusing statement caused attention to be centered on Peter. "*This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.*"

Peter's situation was becoming increasingly more painful, and the conflict in his heart was becoming more bitter; but Peter had already denied once and it was

necessary, he thought, to deny again, with greater emphasis, in order to give credence to his words. "*And he again denied with an oath.*" He denied again and he swore. And so, while perhaps his heart was roaring in a storm because of the preceding scene, a new and more clamorous denial was arriving to cover the first one. He denied and he swore! And it was not enough. He almost felt that even the swearing might be ineffective so he added: "*I do not know the man.*"

Alas, to what unforeseen consequences that disciple who a few hours before was noble and devoted was driving himself! He denied and then denied with an oath, and even added: "*I do not know the man,*" simply "*the man*", that prisoner like any other. There was not even one word that might distinguish Him. "*I do not know.*" The man did not even have enough importance to be known to Peter, when it was a fact that everyone in that place knew Jesus. And that pitiable sinner thought in such a way to have made all suspicion completely vanish. He remained in the midst of the enemies, while Jesus was the target of the most caustic mockery and the vilest contempt.

And Peter, as though he were traversing the scene of a distressing dream, saw everything, although confusedly, and by the glimmer of the fire he was observing the fierce scowls of the troops. He was listening to their vulgar language and remained in the midst of them extending his nervous and trembling hands to the fire, turning his head here and there almost as if to distract

himself and to drive away the dark thoughts that besieged him. Past images were passing through his mind, perhaps of the more tender past up to the scene when Jesus had washed his feet, to the agony of Gethsemane, to the arrest, and to having followed Him, even though from a distance. Alas, Peter followed Jesus only to deny Him with an oath, and to declare not knowing Him. Perhaps in these dark and painful thoughts, other thoughts were arising from them so that, finally, there was no longer anything to hope for, and that henceforward it was useless for Peter to expose himself. By the anxious revival of the instinct of self-preservation, Peter was forgetful of all assurance and the greatness of that Martyr faded for him. At another time, Peter himself had recognized Him to be the Son of God. Perhaps Peter thought it was better to mix in and to dissipate the least suspicion, and becoming more audacious by the crescendo of errors, even he began to shout louder and to mix in a language more vulgar than that of the others. Perhaps, and it is painful to think of it, perhaps even he began to echo the comments of the enemies about Jesus; and thus Peter was speaking and moving about. In the meantime instead of hiding himself he was disclosing himself even more.

Perhaps it was the exaggeration of gestures and speaking, and the agitation portrayed on his countenance. The light of that betraying fire was falling on his countenance putting in strange contrast his convulsed physiognomy with his affected indifference and confidence of his language; and more than anything the accent of his native

Galilee, and even more than the accent, some expression that did not fit in with the situation and with the rest of the attitude of Peter. Mixed in with the vulgar words were some profound expressions, a recollection of three years of intimacy with that marvelous Master, expressions which Peter was not thinking of, but that still came to his lips. Perhaps all this ended by calling the attention of the bystanders even more on Peter.

A complete dissimulation is impossible for an honest character. Oh, it would have been better if in the dark night Peter would have directed his fleeing steps toward the lake of Galilee and would have disappeared among his old acquaintances, rather than to have dared a step so daring and ill-advised. It would have been better to flee far away than to deny Jesus under His very eyes; better, but now it was too late. Satan, alas, was sifting him like wheat, and Satan was stronger than Peter.

And therefore, the bystanders did not believe the denials, nor the swearing, nor the words: "*I do not know the man*", and someone said: "*Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee*" and to be nearer to the original, "*your talk discloses you.*"

Peter felt like he was struck by lightning. He was recognized twice, and he had been able somehow to hide, but in the end he himself, by his ill-advised words, had completely revealed himself. Still he did not change direction. He had started out on the road of denial and he wished to continue, by now unconscious of the

consequences; and he pushed forward to extremes. Peter lacked the cold cynicism with which the most hardened delinquents are armed, and by the very violence of his answers he was betraying his heart, as also his voice that belied his words betrayed him. Therefore, to drive away this danger, he was shouting and protesting more strongly, reaching incredible extremes. *“Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man.”* What did he say in those curses? Was the same Peter unable to preserve recollection, or did he curse only himself; or as seems to us a better translation, *“he began to curse”*? And in his cursing was there one hurled in the direction of that great Martyr, left alone before the mockery, who was called also a spectator of the spectacle that the disgraced disciple was offering? Alas, it is permissible to suspect that all was profaned in that violent cursing. And Peter was cursing and swearing. *“I know not the man.”* And in that moment was heard the sound of the nocturnal herald: the cock crowed. The crowing struck the ear and the heart of Peter and he turned in order to take his face away from the immediate observation of his fireside companions. In turning Peter met the eyes of One who was looking at him with insistent love and infinite compassion. Jesus had not missed any of that scene. Ridiculed, slapped, struck and spit upon, in the midst of His humiliation, Jesus had thought about the disciple, and had followed his movements with compassion and with suffering, and at that point Jesus sought his gaze. The eyes of Peter and those of the Lord met. That silent encounter was more eloquent than any human word. A light passed before

Peter and he saw himself and the abyss into which he had fallen. Peter felt all the tender love of Jesus who was serene and full of self-denial until the end. Peter couldn't stand it any longer; he remembered the words of Jesus: *"The cock shall not crow this day before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."* He fled sobbing, and as he was fleeing, he felt tears rising to his eyes from the depths of his torn heart. He fled alone, humbled and tormented by remorse, crying and sobbing bitterly, while before his tear-filled eyes tears there passed the vision of the tragedy of the Lord. Meanwhile that compassionate and memorable gaze, calm and persevering, was following him.



## Redemption

*“...But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee.”(Mark 16:7).*

*“...And they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.”*

( Luke 24:12 )

*“And Simon Peter...went into the sepulcher.”*

( John 20:6 )

The silences of the scripture are solemn. What became of Peter after his flight from the Court of the High Priest? The scripture is silent, and it would be an error on our part to pretend to tell the story of Peter from that hour until the morning of the resurrection. But, between the two biblical records, *“he went out and wept bitterly”* and the other, *“Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher”*, if we say that there has to be a connection between these two records, then we can imagine what happened to Peter in the meantime.

Peter's heart was torn by remorse, and overcome by infinite tenderness for the Master, whose final tragedy he had not had the heart to follow. On the other hand, followed always by that gaze that had pierced his soul, Peter withdrew alone, at least at the beginning, humbled and almost in desperation, to cry tears of sorrow and shame. Perhaps, at the first impulse of sorrow he thought that he could no longer expect anything good of himself; and from having the utmost of confidence Peter had

passed to the utmost of distrust, and he must have cried out many times between the sobs: "I am a miserable person." But it was those tears and that sobbing, together with that changed sentiment toward himself with the image of that compassionate gaze of Jesus, all this was preparing Peter for redemption.

He was drawn out from his stupor by the marvelous news of the morning of the resurrection. Peter must have been reunited for that morning with the group of disciples. Whatever he might think of himself, he wanted, together with the others, to offer a last tribute to the memory of the Lord. It was not forbidden to the disciples of John the Baptist to render pious service to the cadaver of the decapitated John and it was not forbidden to the disciples of Jesus to also render a tribute of affection to the memory of the Master. It seemed, however, that Peter had lost any spirit of initiative, almost as if he felt that at any moment the sad conduct by which he had separated from the Lord would rise up to accuse him. The women were the first ones to go to the monument bringing spices and they found it open and the tomb empty. An angel appeared to them and said: "*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.*"

"*Tell his disciples and Peter*"- Therefore was Peter no longer a disciple? Or perhaps that second part "*and Peter*" served to let it be understood that even Peter is a

disciple? In this last sense the commission of the angel is explained. Peter had been forgiven, and the Lord Jesus was letting him know with a direct message.

*“And their words (of the women) seemed to them as idle tales ... Then arose Peter and ran to the sepulcher.”*

*“Tell his disciples and Peter.”* When he heard his name pronounced, he felt his old energy coming back, and he experienced the immense joy of a forgiven sin. In the three days spent between anguish and weeping, in which Peter had the time to contemplate his misery, he had truly been prepared for his redemption. Jesus was calling him by name another time. Three years ago He called him near the lake, and now resurrected, He was sending him a message. Tell Peter, that is even Peter, notwithstanding the fall.

Jesus, the great Intercessor had prayed for him, now He was gathering him in His love, and Peter showed himself responsive to that love. He had always loved Jesus and perhaps never as much as he had since he denied Him the way he did. The tears that reconciled Peter with his Master were blessed tears.

And thus, while the others did not believe, Peter arose and ran to the sepulcher. “*Arose, ran”* in these two words there is a portrait of the man. The sacred writer has a very expressive word “*Anastas*” (emerge), almost as if he was waking from a dream or even that he was returning from the dead. And truly Peter would have

been dead without the grace of the Lord. Emerging from his stupor, shaken as if he had been touched by an electric current, he arose and ran toward the sepulcher. Attracted by the great devotion for Jesus, Peter did not go, but ran; he rushed himself, almost without concern for the road. But Peter was not the only one who ran to the sepulcher. Another disciple whose name we will find later on mentioned often with the name of Peter, also went. It was John. Rather John *“did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.”* And following the narrative of St. John, we read: *“Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher.”* The figure of Peter reappears pre-eminent. The younger man ran ahead, but it was Simon Peter who was the first to enter. In these two dispositions there is a story of two hearts - in one there was youthful enthusiasm; in the other there was a more profound affection. Peter's affection was made more mature by the recent experience of which the disciple was bearing the memory. *“And Peter departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.”*

In enumerating the various appearances of Jesus, the apostle St. Paul says: *“And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.”* Therefore, Peter had a special meeting with the Lord, a meeting of which we lack the particulars, which were known only by the Lord and the disciple who had erred. Peter could have been the disciple who could easily have gone astray because of discouragement. Jesus needed to see him alone. Did he

Speak to him of his sin? Oh no. Peter had the opportunity to consider the extent of his sin and to weep for it, but Jesus made him understand that He had pardoned him, and even this pardon, the Lord Jesus wanted to hasten to bring to Peter before seeing the other disciples. Moved by a delicate consideration, Jesus wanted to meet him alone. Imagine the patient and loving behavior of our Master toward us - He reproves us one on one.

With the morning of the resurrection a new beginning had begun for Peter. The disciple, henceforward, instructed by his past experience was setting out toward another phase of his existence. Taught by his weaknesses to depend entirely on the grace of the Lord, Peter was being prepared for his mission.

*“And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”*

### Commission

*“Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, we also go with thee.”*

*“Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, and did cast himself into the sea.”*

*“Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?”*

*“Peter ...saith to Jesus, Lord and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.” (John 21).*

Several days had passed since their return to their native province, since the disciples had received the message *“He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you”*; and in this time of waiting they had become impatient and perhaps some of them began to lose hope of ever seeing the Lord again.

In this boredom of waiting, between the anxiousness and the doubting, on one fine day, as the sun was setting, Simon Peter, in an impetus of his natural impulsiveness, said: *“I go a fishing.”* Whatever you intend to do, as for me, I intend to return to the nets; he united action with his words and moved toward the lake. His companions, who at least at that time were under the influence of

Peter's strong and resolute character, added "*We also go with thee.*"

*"They went forth, and entered into a ship quickly."* The proposal to return to their old occupation freed them from the boredom of waiting and from the anguish of doubting, and they followed him with feverish haste, and hurried to enter into the ship. The expressive language of the Evangelist attempts in the word "*quickly*" to define the disposition of men who had not yet learned the secret of waiting patiently.

There they are, another time, with new enthusiasm, taking the nets up again and testing the tranquil sea, now here, now there.

It was the same sea, the same serene sky, the same fishing equipment, the same strong and expert arms; but alas, they did not have the results of other times, "*and that night they caught nothing.*" Nothing. Such a failure did not really leave them happy.

More than three years had gone by since another night of work when they had taken nothing. But even if they had not forgotten the previous occasion, they were not then thinking about it. The sun was beginning to give the hills a glowing color, and the disciples were still at sea, wasting another attempt, because who knows if the night may not have been entirely lost, when on the shore they saw, little by little, the figure of a man taking shape who was advancing toward them, whom they could not



quickly identify. "*Children, have ye any meat?*" Asked the one who had just arrived. "*No*", they answered. "*And he said unto them, cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw for the multitude of fishes.*" It was then that in the minds of some of them, there was a vivid recollection of the scene three years ago of when Jesus met them on the same lake and at His word they took in an abundant catch.

It was Jesus who was coming to meet them at their old trade when they were worn-out and tired and had no hope.

*"That disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard it that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, and did cast himself into the sea."* John, the one Jesus loved, immediately recognized Jesus, but the other moved first to meet Him. The net was drawn to land full of fishes. They found that Jesus had prepared something to eat for the disciples who were tired and hungry and he invited them to eat. This was a lesson which was very well suited to make the disciples remember that in the future work in which they were to be used, someone would provide for their upkeep. Moreover, all that scene was useful to impress on their minds that they were now called to something quite different, and that the return to their old trade would bring failure.

*“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith to him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”*

A triple question perhaps tending to recall to mind and impress on it the remembrance of the triple denial.

*“Simon, son of Jonas”* – it was the old name by which Jesus called him the first time, and only that time. Simon, son of your father, of Jonas; in this name repeated three times in such a marked way, after that which had happened, there was the recapitulation of the story of three years of discipline. After so much time Jesus still says, *“Simon, son of Jonas! Lovest thou me more than these?”* Thou, ancient man, with your defects that I know and that you yourself must have discovered, do you love Me more than your companions?

There was a veiled reprimand in the allusion to when Peter, in a moment of extreme self-confidence, said to

Jesus that if all would abandon him, he alone would never leave Him and would go with Jesus to prison and to death. But that time had passed, and Peter felt the power of the old name, "*Simon, son of Jonas,*" and did not have the courage to say that he loved Jesus more than the others, because this involved an examination and a judgment on the love of the other disciples. This was an examination and judgment that Peter's soul could not bear to make. And in his answer full of tenderness he speaks only of his affection for Jesus: "*Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.*" Truly, Thou knowest. You read the hearts. This also was an experience realized not long ago, and Peter appeals to that which the Lord knows of his affection, not to the trials that truly had not been very flattering. Jesus was reading Peter's heart that had always been tender and generous. "*Thou knowest that I love thee.*"

We note at this point the two words used in the original text for the words "*to love.*" Jesus said to Peter "*Lovest thou me?* (agapas) to indicate a first degree of affection. Peter answered: "*Thou knowest that I love thee*" (filo) the term "fileo" expresses an intense love. And Jesus twice used the verb that expresses the weaker love, and only in the third question: "*Lovest thou me?*" does He use the same expressive verb as Peter.

Connected with the three questions there is repeated three times the commission of the Master: "*Feed my lambs, feed my sheep, feed my sheep.*" It was a precise commission, to demonstrate that the love that Peter

showed to Jesus had to enable him to perform a ready and loving service, for the benefit of others.

*“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.”* We will return to these words another time. For now it is enough to mention that they contain the prophecy of the martyrdom of Peter. Also, the words contain an express recall to the fact that the disciple must get used to taming his boiling nature, and to endure events with patience. And after those words, Jesus added: *“Follow me.”*

But at these words, the disciple felt himself separated from the group of the others. Peter was honored by that special commission, *“Feed my sheep,”* which was repeated to him forcefully three times, and he felt that he was called alone to a more intimate communion. In that *“Follow me”* Peter thought he was alone. And, so, he thinks, I enjoy this special privilege. Jesus had admonished Peter that he had to tame himself, but he had not yet learned the lesson, so in following the Lord, the first impulse he had was to turn about to see what the others were doing. *“Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following...Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do?”*

Was not that commission *“Feed my lambs, etc.”* directed only to Peter, and was it not to him alone that the

intimate invitation, "*Follow me,*" was addressed? What business did John have, therefore, to also follow, without being called to a privileged communion? Peter felt that his supposed primacy was being usurped. Peter felt that he alone had to feed the sheep of the Lord, or at least to direct the work. He felt that he alone could intimately follow Jesus. "*Lord, and what shall this man do?*" What business does he have here, after what you have told me? Isn't he coming to disturb our plans? These and other thoughts were passing through Peter's head, and instead of keeping his eyes strictly on Jesus, Peter was turning his head to see the business of the others.

But Peter was a disciple who had enough strength and energy so that he could be quickly called back to his place. And Jesus said to Peter: "*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*" It was an uncompromising answer that did not allow discussion, and taught Peter that his desire to do and to direct in the future work had not been transferred to him, but the work belonged only to Jesus, and rather than looking around at the business of others and the special relations that others might have with Jesus, he had to pay attention to himself and to that which was required of him. Whatever the others may do, or I permit to others, does not concern you. Pay attention to yourself. "*Follow thou me,*" and leave the care of the rest to Me.

Friend reader, forgive me if I repeat the words of Jesus: "*What business is it of yours? Follow thou me.*" This admonition directed to Peter is also for us today.

Whatever may be the place occupied by others in connection with the Christian work, whatever it may be that someone does and so on, let us not waste time and energy. Even if our behavior is not malicious, let us not occupy ourselves measuring the duties of this one or that one. What does that have to do with us? Let us pay attention to our affairs and do our best. Let us follow the Master. He is in control of everything and sees everything.

Peter received his lesson as always with devotion and respect, convincing himself even more, that although he was increasing in knowledge and moving forward, there was always something that remained to remind him of his human imperfection.

The horizon is enlarged the higher one rises. Similarly, Peter saw the distance between himself and the Son of God always greater.

## The Apostle

*“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said: (Acts 1:15).*

*“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice...” (Acts 2:14). “Then said Peter unto them, Repent.” (Act 2:38).*

*“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I Thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. “ (Acts 3:6)*

*“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them:” (Acts 4:8).*

*“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” (Acts: 5:3).*

*“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29).*

Having arrived at this point in our writing, perhaps it would have been better not to continue, and to leave it to the reader to read in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles of Peter to see how much else can be extracted about the apostle. Our writing has been principally a study of the character, and not a story of his life or of scriptural interpretation. The words of Jesus directed to Peter have been a sure direction for a study of the



character of Peter. But at this point, since Jesus ascended, we no longer have such a guide. At any rate, we will attempt, with the help of the Lord, to delineate briefly the figure of Peter, from the moment the Lord ascended into Heaven up to the end of his career.

In the passages cited above the figure of Peter is prominently revealed. We consider: first, the selection of a new disciple in the place of Judas Iscariot; second, the fearless and firm work of Peter on the day of Pentecost, and his subsequent work up to the vision that called him to Cornelius.

*“And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out...”*

*“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection. And they appointed two...And thy gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” (Acts 1:15-26).*

We have transcribed a great part of the scripture relative to the election of Matthias in the place of Judas Iscariot, because this incident throws a bright light on the character of the apostle Peter. Note that the election came about immediately after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, not long after the command to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, that is the Holy Spirit. It was an election, completed in a period when the disciples should not have done anything but pray and wait. It seemed to Simon Peter, however, that there was no time to waste and following the hasty counsel of his impulsive nature, he stepped forward to propose that one be elected immediately to the post vacated by Judas. As usual, there is the expressive language of the Scripture: "*Peter stood up in the midst and said.*" There was always the feverish restlessness that drove Peter to act, often on a strictly human basis. It was necessary to have someone in the place of Judas; the replacement had to be one of the men who had been in their company and in addition he had to be chosen by casting lots as soon as possible. It is true that the sacred writer mentions a prayer: "*And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.*" It is true, but this is not the prayer of absolute and complete dependence on the Lord, because they had not prayed before deciding if, when and where the disciple had to be elected.

Such a prayer asked for ratification of that which they had already decided instead of a genuine request for light and guidance.

And Matthias was selected. He was undoubtedly a good man, but of whom we know nothing. The Lord had reserved for himself the choice of a disciple, and we see the contradiction between the plan of God and human judgment. He was choosing not among those who had come and gone in their company, but among the ranks of the enemies. The disciple that the Lord chose was not Matthias, but Paul of Tarsus.

The ways of men are not always the ways of the Lord.

But there is a period of time in which the figure of Peter towers truly by strength, courage and absolute dependence on the Lord.

All the disciples of one accord, prayed and waited for the descent of the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost they were all filled from on high by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jerusalem was full of foreigners and Jews, and here in various languages they were proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection. There was great confusion among the listeners; some were marveling and some were saying that the disciples were drunk. It was on this occasion that Simon Peter rose to a tall and gigantic figure.

Reading the marvelous discourse by Peter summarized in Chapter 2 of the Acts, we are amazed that it could be the same man. *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice.”* It is not the violent man of Gethsemane, nor the timid one of the courtyard of the High Priest. It is a personage who is energetic, sure and aware. Truly he was not the same. It was the same Peter plus the discipline, plus his prayers while waiting, and plus, above all else, the power of the Holy Spirit. And Peter, having become an extraordinary man, revealed himself to be a formidable orator in his confident language. *“Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem ... hearken to my words ...”*. And the people were listening. And since that day perhaps there has never been an orator who was listened to so much and by so many. It was a truly marvelous discourse and the conclusion was: *“Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* Take note of the courage and the precision of the words: *“whom ye have crucified.”* To speak that way in Jerusalem, that was certainly the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this discourse did not remain ineffectual.

*“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. And with many*

*other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.*” Peter is the central figure. The crowd was addressing themselves mainly to Peter. He had entirely forgotten himself and was totally immersed in the love of Christ. Being thus transformed Peter was able to speak with severity and love. He was exhorting and comforting.

We read, “*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*”

What a magnificent netful! Three thousand persons. Great and noble Simon Peter had become a fisher of souls!

Nor does he appear less energetic and confident in other circumstances where we admire the man of absolute faith, not wavering as he did when he had to be reproved by Jesus, who said to him, “*Oh thou of little faith ...*”.

A lame man was brought every day and laid at the gate of the temple to ask alms. “*Who seeing Peter and John, about to go into the temple asked for an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.*”

In our writing about Peter, we have discussed only this one miracle of healing, leaving it up to the reader to read in the Acts of the Apostles the other miracles accomplished by Peter's hand. In this miracle there is presented to us the apostolic conscience of Peter clearly and neatly delineated. Peter was depending entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ. "*Silver and gold have I none (or as could be read: silver and gold do not belong to me), but such as I have give I thee.*" Peter possessed something that others did not have, and he was ready to share it with others. The healing of the lame man is accomplished by the generous expression of a man ready to give what he had, and he would have given even the silver and gold if he had it. "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*" These few words have remained memorable in the history of the church. "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*" A volume could be written on this, but we are rapidly coming to the end of our study. Simon Peter had learned to depend entirely on Jesus, and with an act of assurance he commanded: "*rise up and walk.*" "*And all the people saw him walking and praising God. ...filled with wonder and amazement ...all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's.*" And Peter grasped the occasion of the extraordinary meeting to speak of the Lord Jesus. He was eager to turn the admiration of the bystanders away from himself and from his companion John. "*Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? Or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power of holiness we have made this man to walk?*"

But this miracle also attracted the attention of the heads of the temple. And in the fourth chapter of the Acts is described the first attempt to suffocate the testimony of the disciples with regard to Jesus. Any intimidation was in vain. Peter, truly worthy of his name answered: *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.”* These men showed unusual courage and assurance and were showing themselves to be serene in the face of the most extraordinary events. They were guided by the Holy Spirit and they were strong in the name of the Lord.

A few words concerning Ananias and Sapphira. (Reader, please read Acts 5: 1-10)

Also in this episode Peter is at the height of his mission, and is firm in his place. The punishment of Ananias and Sapphira has been judged with extreme levity by many.

It is not right in order to condemn a severity that often is not understood, to use severity with the Scriptures. It is necessary to keep in mind that this was a budding church and hypocrisy has always been judged to be the most serious of the degrading vices of human nature. The words of Jesus were addressed against hypocrisy with majestic severity.

On the other hand, those who study the scriptures with love will not mind a comparison between the sin and the punishment of Achan upon his entrance into the



Promised Land, and the sin and punishment of Ananias and Sapphira upon the entrance into the Evangelical dispensation.

That rigor was not inherent to the character of Simon Peter whose nature was always generous and tender. In Peter, a compromise due to excessive clemency was more to be feared than austerity. But the austerity of Simon Peter was not the fruit of his natural character, but the fruit of a discipline that caused him to look beyond the present hour, to the great Evangelical dispensation for which that beginning would exercise the most inauspicious or beneficial influence.

And the effect of the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira was beneficial because it succeeded in strengthening the primitive Church and prevented people of doubtful sincerity from assembling with them. *“And believers were the more added to the Lord.”*

One of the first consequences of the progress of the primitive Christian Church was the incarceration of the Apostles. But an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison for them. Being found in the temple, and led again before the Council who imposed on them the condition that they not speak in the name of Jesus, Peter with the others answered, *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”* It can be seen that this firmness was not a momentary enthusiasm, but had become for the disciples an integral part of their mission, and it became the point

of departure of the future work. *“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

The apostles went away from the temple after being beaten, *“rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”*

These two verses (Acts 5:41,42) can be called the missionary program of the Apostolic Church, and in the Apostolic Church, as we have seen, ardent in his faith and courage, Simon Peter stood out.

### Mission Among the Gentiles

*“And there came a voice to him, Rise Peter; kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” (Acts 10:13-15).*

In the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we see the first missionary work to the Gentiles, and the start of a new epoch in the life of the Church.

In this chapter we see how Providence wished to serve itself of a rigid legalist to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. It could not come to Peter's mind that Gentiles and Hebrews could enjoy equal privileges. It was necessary that Peter be taught to have the same consideration for Gentiles as for the elect people, and that there was no distinction between Jews and Greeks. This is an important passage if one considers how marked the lines were then that separated one people from another and how tenacious the sentiments of nationality were, by which a stranger was considered a barbarian by some, and unclean by others. This is an important passage if one considers how it tended and tends to bind men always more together in one large Christian family without distinctions of race and nationality.

Peter had a vision that widened his faith and swept away the scruples that were limiting his work.

The Apostle was in Joppa, where he had been called for important Christian work. One particular day, toward noon Peter went up upon the housetop, as that was the place where in the Middle East, people often withdrew for rest and meditation. While waiting for dinner, Peter utilized an hour in secret communion with the Lord, thus predisposing himself to divine revelations.

*“He fell into a trance (the Greek word is estasi). And saw Heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.”*

There is a danger in the abuse of symbols, yet in the vision of Peter, the symbols are very clearly significant: A vessel similar to a great sheet tied at the four corners containing various species of animals. It is clear to see in this the earth and all its inhabitants united together by the extreme principal points. Israel, the civilized people, and the most unhappy barbarians and savages, all gathered in the same great vessel.

*“Rise, Peter; kill and eat.”* – Peter knew quite well the Mosaic distinction between clean and unclean animals, and being a strict son of Judaism he had not yet risen to the height of the universal idea of the Master. Therefore he attempted a sense of rebellion and said: *“Not so,*

*Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.*” In this flat refusal we see still another time the man of the Gospels. There was no request for explanation; there was no hesitation or desire for light opposite that new and grandiose vision, but there was the absolute “no” of an obstinate character. “Never, I have never in the past eaten anything unclean.” – *“And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, call not thou common.”*

In this answer there is the key of all the missionary work to the Gentiles. The words almost sound like a reprimand: “Don’t make unclean by your scruples the things that God has purified.”

And opening a brief parenthesis here, we note that there are in this world not a few zealots who would like to limit Providence to very narrow boundaries. Peter needed the second voice with its uncompromising injunction. And the voice that was commanding a missionary work to the Gentiles had been heard previously, centuries before in the same city of Joppa. And note the events of that time to another missionary, Jonah, the disobedient prophet who was sent to the Ninevites.

*“This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven.”* This reference to three times is not without reason in the scripture, and it is well understood that it is meant to impress upon the mind of Peter the great importance of the vision.

The moment had indeed arrived in which the Apostle had to receive that teaching and in such a memorable way. In another city, Caesarea, something had happened the day before that concurred with the same end as the vision of Peter.

We read: *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter...He shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake to Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.”*

Providence had arranged events in such a way that while the messengers of Cornelius were about to enter Joppa, Peter, on the other hand, was being prepared to follow them.

*“Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius...stood before the gate...While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.”*

That was the marvelous work of the Lord, that, in two cities He was preparing men of different nationalities to meet together for the great Christian fellowship. It is noteworthy that Peter was kept in suspense until the end. The voice had to speak to him twice, the second time almost as a reprimand, and while he was in doubt the Spirit had to continue to speak to him. It is so true that the force of habit makes even those who are most devoted to the Lord restive and slow to follow the voice of the Spirit.

God had opened a way among the Gentiles. Cornelius, not doubting his vision, was waiting for Peter, and had called his relatives and his close friends. There truly are not many figures in the scripture more beautiful than this Roman official, whose life the Lord intended to reward; and in his confident expectation, Cornelius showed steadfast faith, and in the reunion of his friends he showed vast spirit of spreading the news. Men like Cornelius are rare, but there are still some today in the lands where the Gospel has not penetrated or has barely begun to enter. There are people who are waiting



together with those close to them for the messenger sent by God, to bring to them the message of the good news.

*“And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”*

The Apostle felt the need to repeat what the Gentiles also knew well; that is, that the Jews were not even to enter into the house of a stranger. But Peter had come to Cornelius because God had showed him that he should not call any man unclean or contaminated. That barrier between people that no human force, not even the most bloody persecution or the most flattering offers of friendship could ever have taken away, God was eliminating it and Peter was confessing it, as if he were saying: As for me, I would never have complied with any call from you for whatever purpose, even the highest, if God had not taught me that you are a man like me and have the same rights to love and divine grace.

Cornelius recounted his vision. Peter said: *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons”* and he continued speaking immediately of Jesus of Nazareth, Lord of all who *“went about doing good...And we are*

*His witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree. Him God raised up the third day...He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained to be the judge of the quick and the dead...Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins through his name."*

The door to the Gentile world was open and the preacher was ready. The message was not a program of institutional work or social reforms, but simply the announcement that Jesus Christ had been crucified, and He had risen from the dead; He was appointed Judge, and only through His name can we receive forgiveness of our sins. Now this message is always powerful. And indeed Cornelius and those who were with him needed such a preaching.

We read: *"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because also on the Gentiles was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord."*

### Compromise

*“I said unto Peter before them all, if thou being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (Gal. 2:14)*

“Say of me what I am, leaving nothing out. Disclosing nothing with malicious intent.” ( Shakespeare )

The present chapter would seem to us to be out of place here, given what we know of the visit of Peter to Cornelius and following the vision that was calling Peter to the Gentiles. And yet the words selected from Galatians 2:14 remain in the scripture, a monument carved out to human inconsistency, and remind us yet another time that there was only one perfect man: Jesus of Nazareth. But the others, for as much as they rose on high, have never been perfect.

Years had passed since Peter went to Caesarea the first time to minister the Gospel to the Gentiles and in that time another strong and noble figure was taking shape more every day in the history of primitive Christianity. The Lord had called to His service Saul of Tarsus, a Jew of a great mind and of an elevated character. The words of this text belong to this second disciple, and are addressed to none less than St. Peter.

To leave this passage out would seem to us to be an unpardonable injustice. Whatever may be the impression

one has of the text of Galatians 2: 14, it is indisputable that the fact is as the words describe it.

And the fact is briefly exposed in Galatians 2: 12,13: *“For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.”*

In these verses there are very heavy words: *“he withdrew; dissembled; dissimulation.”* These words refer to a very great man, to Simon Peter, the same man who had been in the school of the Lord Jesus and who had seen Him resurrected. These words refer to the same Simon Peter who was a preacher at the Pentecost, a courageous witness before the Sanhedrin, the severe and inexorable censor of Ananias and Sapphira who was tested by the prison of Herod. Above all these words refer to the same man who had received that solemn warning from heaven: *“What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”*

How is this possible? Are these just words? Even if the words are not pleasing, the fact always remains: Peter, for fear of those of the circumcision, separated himself from the Gentiles and was no longer eating with them. We will attempt to make a brief examination of this deplorable fear and dissimulation.

From the brief passages cited above it can be seen that there were two currents in the church, one strictly Jewish, the other a broader spirit that did not allow distinctions, for the privileges of the Gospel, between Gentiles and Jews. Paul belonged to the second current, and Peter was in agreement with Paul. In fact, Peter had never forgotten the vision he had in Joppa of the great vessel coming down from heaven symbolizing the world with all its inhabitants, be it Jews, pagans or barbarians. Obeying that great vision, Peter went to the house of Cornelius, and learned that God had no regard for the quality of persons and that the God of Jews is the God of other people.

But there are certain sentiments, the consequence of inveterate habits and beliefs that tenaciously resist in the hearts of men. To free oneself completely is not given to everyone.

We who read the lives of great men marvel at how they could have fallen into errors that they could have easily avoided. Some, on the other hand, believe that the saints who have reached a certain height of experience are above reproach. Not so; even in the most saintly, the battle lasts as long as life, and inconsistencies and errors show themselves until the end.

There are two errors that stand out clearly delineated in the life of Simon Peter. The first belongs to his youth, the second to his mature age. The first is the error of a disciple, the second of an apostle. The one seems to cut

off any bond with Christ, whom he denies; the other is that he feels one way, but acts in another. However, neither the first error nor the second had deep roots in the heart of the man.

And the two errors called for two different reproofs. For the first it was the crowing of the cock and the gaze of Jesus. For the second it was the reprimand of a fellow apostle.

Why Peter was eating with the Gentiles, before he gave occasion to be reproved can be clearly explained. As we have said, he understood that Gentiles and Jews were equal in Christianity, and he felt perfectly tranquil fraternizing with them. Why he separated himself from the Gentiles and was no longer eating with them should be explained more clearly.

It is not that Peter understood that what he was doing before was wrong and needed to be corrected. He knew that he had acted well by living as the Gentiles, but he was experiencing the deplorable influence of a counter-current and wanted to arrive at a compromise.

There was, as we have said, a strictly Jewish party that had not understood the unlimited mission of Christianity in relation to people and social distinctions. At the head of this party there were also men of great respect and authority. Christianity, barely in its infancy, was entering into a hostile world travailed by the dualism. Peter saw the error of those of the circumcision, but

feared too much for the disturbance of peace and harmony and he did not want to come into conflict with anyone. He thought thus to save the situation, and to satisfy Jews and Gentiles.

However, as happens in compromises, instead of satisfying them, often all parties are dissatisfied. Simon Peter, desirous to silence the Jewish party, feigned an austerity that was not in him, and he was carried away with dissimulation now with one party, now with another. In this deplorable contrast an energetic and uncompromising voice was needed, and it was the voice of St. Paul. *“If thou being a Jew livest after the manner of the Gentiles, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? Why this contradiction? We have already given the answer, and we repeat it: It was the desire of Peter to be a peacemaker and to keep the dissension in the Church from getting worse.*

And yet, already up in years, and after such a long experience, Simon Peter had not learned the great truth that in the world not even the best-intentioned man can satisfy everyone. Peter had not learned that compromising against one's own conscience is always deplorable and can be ascribed either to guilt or to cowardice! Above all, certain compromises are the exponent of faith more in human discretion and cleverness than in the goodness of the cause which must triumph at any cost.



Moses, perhaps the greatest man of the Old Testament, appears to us absolutely unshakeable when, before Pharaoh, he does not yield even one line of his demand and heroically resists all the various tempting propositions of the sovereign of Egypt, to whom he says at the end that not even a hoof of the cattle must be left behind.

It is God's cause, and He will grant triumph in spite of obstacles and contentions. Our place is to remain solid as rocks.

Except, if it is difficult to successfully resist the compromises of the enemy, it is much more difficult, it seems to us, to say "no" to the compromises that are suggested by our friends, especially when their ideals are for the most part ours, and we know them to be honest and sincere.

And so Peter, who heroically resisted the Sanhedrin: "*Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye*" yields later to pretense and to dissimulation between two friendly currents, the one Jewish, the other Gentile. It is so true that it is easier to preserve one's character whole and equilibrated in the face of severe contrasts of life than it is when events are very favorable and one is in the presence of very dear friends whom one would never want to displease.

Therefore Peter was drawn to dissimulation, because of the excessive goodness of his soul. After years of certified heroism and an immaculate life he is coming to one of those reefs on the map of religious humanity, against which many excellent people risk being smashed. And in that blending of courageous firmness and weakness is sculpted the image of that which is, even in the best, our miserable existence. And everything reminds us that there would not be any man who would arrive safe and sound to the end if, along the way, the mercy and the grace of God did not smile upon him.

The Elder – The Martyr

*“Simon, Simon...and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”* (Luke 22: 31,32).

*“the elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.”*  
(1 Peter 5: 1).

*“Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”*  
(2 Peter 1: 5-7)

*“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”* (2 Peter 3: 18)

*“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.”* (John 21: 18,19)

*“I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims...”*  
(1 Peter 2: 11)

*“An entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”*  
(2 Peter 1: 11)

After a difficult ascent of a mountain, having arrived at the top, the traveler turns back to look at the tortuous path by which, breathless, he has climbed; his eye embraces a vast panorama and he knows then how much walking he could have spared himself. And yet, errors have their importance, because distinguished men, by the experience of their mistakes have learned to strengthen others.

At the end of our brief work on the Apostle, the words of the Master resound in our ears: "*Simon, Simon I have prayed for thee. When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" And the remembrance of this warning presents itself spontaneously in reading the Epistles of Peter, if indeed it is true that from his writing we can appreciate the progress made by that great one.

The Epistles of Peter have been defined thus by someone: "Christ the strength of his people." References to Peter's own experience abound in them, with exhortations and witnessing.

The introduction is noteworthy: The Apostle calls himself Peter, the name given to him by the Master. The whole process of exhortation is that strength comes to the Christian by perfect trust in the Lord. The expressive way in which he explains the conflict with the adversary is remarkable, and it seems that we read again between the lines, the words "*Satan hath desired to sift you.*" Look out! Is the predominant note of his writing.

Another exhortation of the Apostle is “Grow”: “*Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.*”

It is well, however, to advise here of an inaccuracy in the translation, which, although it appears to be slight, leads to serious errors of interpretation. It is not “*Add to your faith virtue...*”, as if the most noble edifice of character had faith as the fundamental stone, upon which the believer would superimpose one virtue after the other. The precise translation is “*Add in your faith...*”. It is in the faith, not to the faith (Eu te pistei’). It’s as if the Apostle were saying: “never failing in the faith, so may your Christian character grow. Each step in faith.” They are the words of the Apostle, the fruit of quite a long experience, and they reveal the result of a struggle of many years, at times intimately tragic. The result of an obstinate continuous work can be seen in which the principal part has been to submit to the inner force of the Spirit. The idea comes to me that the great edifice of the Christian character, as presented in the words, “*Add to your faith virtue...*” is more the effect of a work of continuous yielding to the work of sanctification rather than personal exertion in behavior. The Apostle had to learn to cast away his will, many times, and in the measure that he yielded to a will working in him, the Christian edifice, majestic and solid was being built.

And if it is true that in the exhortations given by us to others there is the image of our past life, Peter's conduct before his Christian career appears, in the Epistles of Simon Peter in precise gradations and in straightforward lines. – Many years have past since the time of his calling to be a disciple, and in this long time, in struggles often invisible to others, that impulsive, generous, but often obstinate man, had to reflect on at length and to measure more every day the words of the Master left to him as the directive line of his walk.

The elder.– These letters were written by a man who calls himself “elder”, not something else. The power of these writings does not come from an authority that Peter attributed to himself, rather it arises objectively from the fact that he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and he himself had a rich experience.

*“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder.”* This is quite a different language from what we would have expected from the man many years ago, when John was also following the Lord Jesus a few steps behind Him, and Peter had to be reprimanded. *“What is that to thee?”* Simon Peter truly is no longer the same. There is no exclusiveness in his words, rather all authority is ascribed only to Christ, *“the Chief Shepherd.”*

The elders like him are exhorted to *“feed the flock, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over*

*God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.*" These are precious words that serve to demolish in the minds led astray by errors, the immense human edifice, all designed on the pretense that Simon Peter was the first pope. Let the reader cling to the direct impressions that he obtains from the writings of the Apostle and from the history of the primitive church and let him judge for himself in his honest and serene conscience what he must make of pretensions that have accumulated over the centuries and hidden the true Simon Peter, simple and great, notwithstanding his errors, in order to make of him one who would pretend to dominate and establish a hereditary sovereignty.

*"I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims."*

*"An entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

These verses seem to us to be the prelude to the final act of martyrdom that crown the life of Simon Peter.

The Apostle was speaking to the faithful of the scattered flock. They truly could be called strangers. A people without a country. But the words "*Strangers and pilgrims*" apply to all Christians. This earth is not our home and we are strangers in this world. We are pilgrims traveling to another country. No house here, but one elsewhere. One can be a stranger without being a pilgrim. A stranger is often a vagabond; a pilgrim is a traveler. Although we are strangers and pilgrims we still



have something to do in this world, but our occupations are a stage in our journey. Our hearts desire the house in the beyond. Often in writings of the saints, we find brief parentheses, expressions that reveal the sighing of the souls, and indicate the condition of "*strangers/pilgrims.*"

*"An entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."* "Abundantly" is from a Greek word that denotes a full chorus of music. It gives us the idea of the soul, that upon passing into the eternal kingdom receives a cordial salute from the musicians of the celestial city, and this idea is taken from the customs of the ancient cities of Greece, in which it was customary to receive with festive music the heroes who were returning from military expeditions full of wounds and with tattered clothing. This is the perfect image of the Christian soldier who goes to his home in heaven, having come out of the struggles of spiritual and moral battles.

And the Apostle Peter, in calling others strangers and pilgrims, and in speaking of this abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom, thought of himself as a pilgrim. Before the vision of the man who by now had become old, there was shining, a short time away, the martyrdom prophesied to him by the Lord. He always remembered these words: "*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.*" A twofold

prophecy of which the first part had already come to pass. Peter had learned to renounce himself. The principal part of the prophecy remained, as the Evangelist tells us: *"This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God."*

In following this study, we have adhered to the light of the scripture. This is not a life in the sense that we could have understood it if we wished to know more of the particulars. How many years Peter lived, the precise time of his death, and the like, we do not know.

The biographers of the Bible are very brief, and often lacking from our point of view. But the aim of the Scriptures is not the same as that of the irreverent biographer. In the Bible there is as much as suffices to know Simon Peter and to learn from his virtues and weaknesses so that we can know ourselves, and trust always more in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before Peter's vision the announced martyrdom appeared always closer. The Apostle has come to maturity and his writings reveal the serene and tranquil soul of the pilgrim who is waiting for the call home where a glorious entry will be ministered unto him.

And his hour came. Having escaped miraculously from the prison of Herod many years before and having emerged free from perhaps a thousand dangers during his apostleship, at the end of his life an unnatural death was awaiting him: The Martyrdom. And, glorious record, at

the end of his career there was planted a cross. The same death endured by his Lord was awaiting him - the crucifixion. Thus to him was given the privilege of following the Master.

But when the Apostle Peter found himself before the cross, and was about to be put on it, a ray of light lit up his past, and he saw, after so many years, what an abyss still separated him from his Lord, and in a moment an idea flashed across his mind. Turning to the executioners he directed a request to them. He wished (as related by Origene) to be crucified with his head down. He felt unworthy to undergo the same crucifixion as his Lord. And so it was done.

Still another word: We have not meant to write a controversial or doctrinal study. At the end of this hurried work we feel there is much to be said. But if it has served to bring a single soul closer to the feet of Jesus, we are satisfied.

In closing this work on Simon Peter, we feel an emptiness in our soul. Many times, in religious silence, with a verse of the scripture under our eyes, we have tried to portray the life of this great man in the various stages of his ascending career of disciple, Apostle and up to his martyrdom. I confess that his character has a powerful fascination. In many of his errors and weaknesses of the first years, we see our errors revealed; but alas, in many of his heroic virtues, we do not resemble him.

In closing, I cannot do better than to refer, if my memory serves me, to the judgment made on Peter, and summed up thus:

“He did not have the calm contemplation of John, nor the profound spiritual intuition and greatness of Paul. But he appears to be the one most suited to sympathize with the fragility and weaknesses of humanity.”

THE END

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