

Saint Peter Apostle/II Trinity 2025
Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Acts 12.1-11 St. Matthew 16.13-19

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Just who was this man called Simon Peter, whose feast day we celebrate today? He seems like the most unlikely candidate to be a leader in the early Church, much less the “rock foundation” on which Jesus will build his Church.

Peter was born in Bethsaida in Galilee. Jesus also called him Simon bar-Jonas...Simon the Son of John. Today we would call him Simon (or Peter) Johnson. His Galilean accent gave him away...people would have known where he was from. He would have had a basic education...but he possessed no university degree. He was by all accounts an average guy.

In the great hymn “I sing a song of the saints of God” (#243, H1940), we sing the saints of God are just ordinary folk like us...and we want to be just like them. Peter’s ordinary background made him the perfect choice to be a leader in the Church...and that is why his story is so believable.

Peter and his brother Andrew worked alongside James and his brother John, Zebedee’s sons, in the Zebedee Family Fishing Business. Jesus called them to be his first disciples...to follow him...and they would be taking on a new task to go out and fish for people. Jesus is preparing these first disciples to become the missionaries to preach the Good News to the world.

Jesus recognized in Peter a man who was faithful, who with James and John, would become his inner circle and closest friends. Jesus also knew Peter could be impulsive and bullheaded and didn’t always think things through before speaking.

In the Gospel, Peter declares Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus responds this isn’t something he figured out on his own...it is a truth that was revealed to him by his Father in heaven. Later in the Gospel, Peter rejects the idea Jesus was going to have to die. Jesus rebuked Peter and called him Satan, and an obstacle in his way. Peter, the “rock foundation” on which Jesus would build his Church, was tested in every way we are tested, and it made him stronger.

The Scriptures teach us Jesus set Peter apart from the other Apostles. He was given a special leadership role. He helped form the Church in Jerusalem and for a time was its primary spiritual leader, but soon gave way to James, who became the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and the first Apostle to suffer martyrdom. Peter, like our friend Saint Paul, was a missionary bishop.

Peter's name appears in the List of the Apostles in all four of the Gospels and in Acts. He presided over the synod that elected Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot. At first he was eager to welcome Gentiles into the Church without placing any conditions on them. But he caved into pressure from Jewish Christians, who insisted Gentiles must observe Jewish dietary and other laws before they could become members of the Church. Paul sharply criticized Peter for his backsliding and Peter made a very public apology for his words and actions.

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Peter's remarkable conversion on the Day of Pentecost was a watershed moment in his life. He was no longer the coward who angrily said he didn't know Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and ran away. He was now empowered by the Holy Spirit to be brave and to preach the Good News about Jesus to all who would listen. He could still be impulsive and bullheaded...he could at times act like he had rocks in his head.

Peter and the other Apostles are the "rock foundation" upon which Jesus built the Church, with Jesus as the cornerstone. This is the beginning of the Apostolic Succession we Anglican Catholics believe essential..the authority of the Apostles to lead and teach is passed down through an unbroken line of bishops by laying-on-of-hands to this day.

Peter was a man of great faith. According to tradition, he was martyred in Rome c 64-68 AD. Jesus didn't choose him because he was perfect... he chose him precisely because he wasn't perfect. Neither are we. If we were perfect and always got it right...we wouldn't need Jesus...we wouldn't need the Church.

Jesus asked Peter what he thought about him? Peter gave the right answer and so must we...He is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. And the gates of hell will never overcome the "rock foundation" upon which the Church is built.

