

Peter: Keys to Following Jesus by Tim Gray

Discussion Guide

“The story of Peter is our story, and it is worth retelling. It’s worth telling how we go from Jesus in Galilee to the Catholic Church in Rome by following the footsteps of Jesus’s greatest disciple, Peter the Galilean.” (p. 199)

Dr. Gray’s purpose in writing this book is to show us seven interactions between Jesus and Peter, and sometimes other disciples, which demonstrate His message of discipleship and evangelization. Although these are stories and scripture we have heard before, the author incorporates the shared history of the Jews and the symbolism that ties our histories together.

1. Peter comes to meet Jesus on the water. He takes his eyes off of Jesus and looks at the rough waters, and begins to sink. A primary tenet of discipleship: be constant in your faith, with your eyes fixed on Jesus. Remember that fear undermines faith.
2. After the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the Apostles are quite proud of Jesus’s success. Jesus warns them to avoid the leaven, comparing it to the pride of the Pharisees. There are so many references to yeast and leaven in both the Old and New Testament. True disciples do not seek success and prestige in the world, but rather imitate the humble service of Jesus.
3. The Apostles feared, even after the miracle of the loaves and fishes, that they would not have enough bread to eat. Jesus cautions them not to have spiritual blindness which prevents them from seeing and believing the power of Jesus to take care of them. Dr. Gray reminds us that true disciples have confidence in Jesus, and when we become overly concerned about the needs or things of the world, we become spiritually blind and apostolically ineffective.
4. Jesus gave Peter the office of prime minister. When Peter reacted to Jesus’s statement that He must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day, Jesus rebuked him that he must be on the side of God, not of man. Dr. Gray reminds us that Jesus is the king and we must follow His way, which is the way of the Cross. True disciples should expect the Cross, because their word will be resisted by the world. It is through the Cross that God’s providence brings about the kingdom of love.
5. When in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter, James, and John repeatedly fell asleep while they were to be watching over Jesus. True disciples must be vigilant in prayer and in following the example of Jesus.
6. As Jesus is taken from the Garden of Gethsemane to the house of Caiaphas, Peter followed at a distance. This weakened his resolve and culminated in his threefold denial of Jesus. True disciples cannot follow Jesus from a distance, or be a comfortable disciple. Too much comfort--attachment to the world and detachment from the way of Jesus--weakens our resolve and leads to failures in discipleship.
7. After Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus invited him to acknowledge his love three times. This allowed reconciliation and restoration of Peter’s leadership. True disciples

can always count on Jesus to invite them back into His life and ministry, even after failures.

Some food for thought from Dr. Gray:

1. He doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. (p.14)
2. The good news is that every saint has a past and every sinner has a future. (p.41)
3. The greatest impediment to generosity is fear of the future. (p.50)
4. We must focus on the good news of Jesus Christ and not on the bad news that the world has to offer. (p.57)
5. We become blind to Christ if we put ourselves in a bad situation. (p.66)
6. We cannot reduce the entire mission of Jesus to just his death. That would minimize the importance of his teachings, miracles, and other things he needed to accomplish before his Death, including giving Peter the keys. (p.97)
7. You can't be loyal to the king if you don't submit to his kingdom, which is the Church. (p.112)

Art that tells a story:

1. Storm on Sea of Galilee by Rembrandt—note that the different apostles have on the boat. Peter is so busy on the boat because of the storm. He has his back to the light that is peaking through the clouds. When we fight storms on our own, we are oblivious to the light. (p.53)
2. Delivery of the Keys by Perugino—this painting is displayed in the Sistine Chapel, where cardinals gather to elect a new pope as successor of Peter. (p.82)
3. The Deliverance of St. Peter by Raphael—the lighting is particularly interesting: a moonlit sky, a guard's torch, but the brilliant light is from the liberating angel. (p.173)
4. The Crucifixion of Peter by Michelangelo—As Peter is being lifted up, he strains his neck to look at you. Are you ready for the cost of discipleship? (p. 190)
5. The Prophet Jonah by Michelangelo—Jonah and the fish look like they would fall directly on the chair of the Holy Father. Michelangelo is depicting Jonah as a key symbol for Peter and that Peter and his successors, the popes, were to be “bar-Jonahs” entrusted with proclaiming God's message of love, mercy, and forgiveness to the world.

Final thought from Tim Gray: The closer we get to knowing Peter, the closer we get to Jesus.