

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
February 1, 2015  
Spiritual Ponderings  
St. Peter's Fall and Reconciliation

The month of February can be a very long month for many of us despite it being the shortest of months in terms of actual calendar days. All the festive holidays are over with and all we have to look forward to at this point is the beginning of Lent. I thought for this month's Spiritual Ponderings I would focus on the Apostle Peter and in a special way his denial of Christ and his return to grace. I desire to do this for two reasons, the first is that on February 22<sup>nd</sup> we will celebrate the feast of the Chair of St. Peter and secondly I believe his story is an awesome story of conversion which can inspire us to make this upcoming Lent more meaningful.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen in his book *The Priest is not His Own* said this about St. Peter: **No other Apostle arouses so much sympathy in the priest's heart as Peter. He seems very close to each of us in his conflicts and emotions, his strength and his weakness, his resolve to be heroic and his disastrous failure to live up to his aspiration. At one moment he is humble, at another proud. He affirms fidelity to his Lord, then denies Him. He is so supernatural, yet so very weak and natural. He extols as divine the Master he loves, only to be frightened by a servant girl into saying that he does not know "the man". No chain is stronger than its weakest link, and the weakest link in the entire apostolic chain was the first link, Peter—and the Son of God holds on to that . Hence the "gates of hell shall not prevail."**

As we take a deeper look at St. Peter's denials of Christ we will use Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book: *Characters of the Passion: Lessons on Faith and Trust*. Quotes from the book will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font. In this book Archbishop Fulton Sheen helps us notice five steps that ultimately lead to St. Peter's denials of Christ: 1) Neglect of Prayer, 2) Substitution for Action For Prayer, 3) Luke warmness, 4) Satisfaction of material wants, feelings, and emotions, and 5) a need for Human Respect.

1. Neglect of Prayer

**No soul ever fell away from God without giving up prayer. Prayer is that which establishes contact with the Divine Power and opens the invisible resources of heaven. However dark the way, when we pray, temptation can never master us. The first step downward in the average soul is the giving up of the practice of prayer the breaking of the circuit with divinity, and the proclamation of one's own self-sufficiency.**

Every good person is close to becoming a bad one and every bad one is close to becoming a good one. Our freewill allows us to decide to live a moral life or not but our free will does not allow us to determine if an action is a moral one enough. Prayer helps us to know the Creator's will for us and thus gives us a better chance of making choices that are moral.

Fr. John Bartunek in his book: *A Guide to Christian Meditation* has this to say about prayer: "Prayer as its most basic level is conversation with God. This seems obvious, but it harbors an awesome reality. To converse with someone implies that that someone wants to pay attention to you, otherwise you have a monologue, not a conversation. The mere existence of prayer implies that God is paying attention, that he is interested in spending time with you."

We would all be excited if someone famous wanted to sit down and talk with us. Why is that so many ignore the opportunity to develop a deep friendship with God? Prayer should always be a priority in our lives.

Further on in his book Fr. Bartunek points out: "Christian meditation differs essentially from transcendental meditation and other New Age centering techniques. Christian meditation is Christ-centered, a loving dialogue between Christ and the soul that deepens your friendship with Christ. It starts with the Holy Spirit urging you to pursue a greater knowledge and love of Christ and ends with your renewed commitment to follow and imitate Christ in the unique circumstances of our daily life.

Transcendental meditation, on the other hand, is self-centered. Instead of a dialogue with God, an opening of the soul to God, it consists primarily in calming the many passions of the soul, creating a self-induced interior tranquility and focus that overflows in certain types of feelings. The goal of transcendental meditation is to withdraw from the complexities of life in order to experience emotional tranquility the goal of Christian meditation is to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ more completely to discover and embrace God's will for you more and more each day."

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**February 8, 2015**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**St. Peter's Fall and Reconciliation**

As we move through the month of February and look at what led to St. Peter's denial of Christ and how he eventually reconciled with Christ, we will continue using Archbishop Fulton Sheen's book: *Characters of the Passion: Lessons on Faith and Trust*. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in the normal font.

#### Substitution of Action for prayer

**Most souls still feeling the necessity of doing something for God and the Church turn to the solace of activity. Instead of going from prayer to action, they neglect the prayer and become busy about many things. It is so easy to think we are doing God's work when we are only in motion or being fussy.**

Unfortunately "being busy" has become a status symbol today. There are times when we feel people will like us better if we considered "busy people." Being busy can also become dangerous when it stops us from entering into meaningful relationships with God and others out of a fear of being rejected by others. Plus most people do not make good decisions when they are busy because they become less aware of the total picture.

**Peter is no exception. In the turmoil of the arrest of Our Blessed Lord which followed, Peter, who had already been armed with two swords, allows his usual impetuosity to get the better of him. Slashing out rather recklessly at the army gang, what he strikes is not a soldier at all, but a slave of the High Priest. As a swordsman Peter was a good fisherman. The slave steps aside, and the blow aimed at the crown of his head merely cuts off his ears. Our Blessed Lord restored the ear by a miracle, and then turning to Peter said, "...Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Mathew 26:52). Divinity has no need of it. He could summon twelve legions of angels to His aid if He wished. The Church must never fight with the weapons of the world.**

Here like Peter, I want to fight with weapons of the world. If someone wrongs me I want revenge. This is why prayer is so important because it helps me to remember that the world's ways do not lead to happiness only God's ways do.

#### Lukewarmness

**Experience soon proves that religious activity without prayer soon degenerates into indifference. At this stage souls become indifferent. They believe one can be too religious too zealous, or "spend too much time in church." Peter exemplifies this truth.**

**A few hours later, Our Blessed Lord is led before His judges—and one is almost inclined to say, "May God forgive us for calling them judges." As the sad procession moves on in the unutterable loneliness where the God-man freely subjects Himself to the evil darts of others, the gospel records, "and Peter followed Him from afar." He had given up prayer, then action, and now. Only his eyes remain on the Master.**

The days that I think I am the worse Catholic are not days in which I commit major sins but rather days in which I wonder if anyone would even know that I am a Catholic. If Peter had been next to Jesus then there would be no way for Peter to deny him. Peter on the other hand went from being feverent (even if I should have to die) to very passive (I tell you I do not even know the man," all in a matter of hours. I feel like I can do it sometimes in a matter of minutes.

**We still linger as from force of habit—or perhaps even from remorse of conscience—in the footsteps of the Master, but out of the range of both His eyes and His voice. It is in such moments that souls say, “God has forgotten me.” When the truth is that is not God who leaves us, it is we who stray on behind.**

I know that if God has forgotten me then I would cease to exist but yet I still doubt His love despite the fact that I am here. Mother Teresa despite years of dryness never doubted in God because she had thrown her whole self into doing his will. I hope and pray that I can do the same.

**Once the divine fades in life, the material begins to assert itself. The excessive dedication to luxury and refinement is always an indication of the inner poverty of the spirit. When the treasures that rust consumes, moths eat, and thieves break through and steal. When the inner beauty is gone, we need luxuries to clothe our nakedness.**

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**February 15, 2015**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**St. Peter’s Fall and Reconciliation**

In just a few days we will be entering into Lent and so let us continue to look at what led St. Peter to deny Christ and how he eventually reconciled with the Lord. Quotes from Fulton Sheen book: *Characters of the Passion: Lessons on Faith and Trust* will be in bold and my work will be in the normal font.

*Satisfaction of material wants, feelings, and emotions*

**It is only natural, therefore, to find that in the next stage of his decline, Peter should be satisfying his body. He does not go into the courtroom. He remains outside with the servants; and in the expressive language of sacred Scripture, “...when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were sitting about it, Peter was in the midst of them (Luke 22:55)**

St. Peter has now moved to a state in his life where he never thought he would be just 24 hours earlier. Instead of standing beside Christ and declaring his undying loyalty to the Son of God, the man Peter saw transfigured he is now trying to comfort himself in a fire outside hoping no one will remember that he was a follower of Christ.

**There is a process going on in Peter, but is hardly progress, for it is a downward movement—walking, standing, sitting. That is exactly what Peter did. Walking: He followed Him from afar.” Standing: He went into the court and stood among the people. Sitting: He sat by the fire that the enemies of Christ had built. Luxury had replaced fidelity. Never before was anyone so cold before a fire!**

I know that in my life when I am confident of God’s love the last thing I worry about is my own physical comfort, but when I am not confident in God’s love for me then I try to surround myself with material goods to protect and comfort me.

Human respect

**The last stage in the fall is human respect, when we deny our faith or are ashamed of it, under ridicule or scorn. A worldly religion will get on well with the world, but not a divine one. As our Lord warned, “when they persecuted you in one town, flee to another. Amen, I say to you, you will not finish the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (Mathew 10:23).**

After reading the above quote, I cannot help but wonder if I would ever deny Jesus if there was no one else. My desire to be liked/loved though can cause me to not declare my loyalty to Christ because I know that Christ even 2,000 years later is still a controversial figure. It is also important to point out that to deny the Catholic Church and all its teachings is to deny Christ for we are His Mystical Body.

**As the blaze of that fire lighted up the face of Peter, it was possible for bystanders and those who came into the court to see his face. At that very moment, when our Blessed Lord in court was taking an oath proclaiming His divinity, Peter was taking an oath, too—not to reaffirm that Christ was the Son of the Living God, but rather to deny it.**

The law demanded Jesus to take an oath. Peter on the other hands tries to add force behind his words of denial by swearing. Jesus humbly submits to the Law but Peter pride fully denies the truth. I have definitely been in Peter's shoes before. When I am exalting myself, I know that it is only a matter of time before I am humbled.

**Human respect had gotten the better of Peter. How often others know what we ought to do, even when we have forgotten. How touchy are those consciences that have abandoned their God! How sensitive they are to even the memory that they once had the faith! Many a time I have heard such souls say, "Do not talk about it! I want to forget it." But we can never forget—even our speech betrays that we had been with the Galilean.**

Why does the opinion of others matter so much? I will not be judged by them in eternal life.

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway. If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway. What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway. Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway. In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway. - Mother Teresa

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**February 22, 2015**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**St. Peter's Fall and Reconciliation**

Talk about timing, as the month of February comes to an end, we find ourselves on the Feast of The Chair of St. Peter. For the last three weeks we have been reflecting on what led St. Peter to deny Christ and today we will look at the steps that led St. Peter to reconcile with Jesus. Quotes from Fulton Sheen book: *Characters of the Passion: Lessons on Faith and Trust* will be in bold and my work will be in the normal font.

So if these are the steps away from faith, what are the steps back to its embrace?

**1. Disillusionment. Since pride is a capital sin, it follows that a first condition of conversion is humility: The ego must decrease, God must increase. This humiliation most often comes by a profound realization that sin does not pay, that it never keeps its promises, that just as a violation of the laws of health produces sickness, so a violation of the laws of God produces unhappiness.**

The division between the world and Jesus basically comes down to the idea of two paths. Each promises that their path will lead a person to happiness. A person on a worldly path must first come to the conclusion that the things that the world promise would lead to happiness (money, sex, violence, etc.) do not actually lead to happiness. It is then that we can choose the other path – the path of Christ. Think of the Prodigal Son story.

**2. Response to Grace. The next step in the return to God after the awakening of conscience through the disillusionment of sin is on God's part. As soon as we empty ourselves, or are disillusioned, He comes to fill the void. "... No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). And Saint Luke tells us, "And the Lord turning looked on Peter" (Luke 22:61).**

It is not enough to feel sorry for your sin, you must accept the opportunity for reconciliation. The difference between Judas and Peter is that Judas continued to do things his way and Peter turned to the Lord. Judas kept going down the path that he laid out before him and Peter turned off of his own path and took the Lord's path.

3. **Amendment.** As sin begins with the abandonment of mortification, so conversion implies return to it. The king in Hamlet asked, "Can one be forgiven and retain the offense?" There are such things as occasions of sin, namely, those persons, places, and circumstances that dry rot the soul.

Peter's conversion would not be complete unless he left that arena where maidservants, slaves, and human respect combined to make him deny the Master. No longer will he warm himself by fires, nor sit passively while his Judge is judged. The Scripture records his amendment or purgation in the simple words, "And going forth." All the trappings of sin, the ill-gotten goods, the human respect he won, all these are now trampled underfoot, as "he goes out."

Peter no longer cares about physical comfort or what others think of him. He is too full of grief and grace. His emotions show forth how much he loved Jesus and he does not care what others are thinking of him, a grown man crying. Peter will eventually be crucified also as a sign of his unwillingness to deny Christ again.

4. **Sorrow.** But this leaving of the tabernacles of sin would not be enough where there is not sorrow. Some leave sin only because they find it disgusting. There is no real conversion until that sin is related to an offense against the Person of God. "Against Thee have I sinned," says Scripture, not against "Space-time," or the "Cosmic Universe," or the "Power Beyond." Have a sorrow that regrets offending God because He is all good and deserving of all our love, and you have salvation. –

Peter is sorry that he has hurt someone else and not because he has been caught or because he receives some political gain. He is sorry because he has hurt the one he loves.

Fittingly, therefore do the evangelists write, "And Peter going out, wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). His heart was broken into a thousand pieces, and his eyes that looked into the eyes of Christ, now turn into fountains. Moses struck a rock, and water came forth. Christ looked on a rock and tears came forth. Tradition has it that Peter wept so much for his sins that his cheeks were furrowed with their penitential streams.