

The Feast of St. Peter

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Date: 29 June 2025

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[0 : 00] Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Peter, who was formerly known as Simon son of Jonah. Most of the sermons that I've heard on Peter, and I imagine what you've heard as well, highlights the failures of this apostle, like when he denied our Lord three times, or his unwillingness to eat with Gentiles.

Such sermons go on to make the point that if our Lord could forgive Peter after such betrayal, then we can be assured of our forgiveness as well.

And there's nothing wrong with that sermon. That is a very good sermon. But that's not the route I'm going to take in this sermon this morning. Instead, I want to focus on the confession of Saint Peter as it relates to who our Lord really is.

Our Lord asked the disciples, who do people say the Son of Man is? Peter quickly responds by saying, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The word Christ here is another word for Messiah. It means anointed one. That is one that's set apart to be king.

[1 : 20] Throughout the old covenant, priests and kings were anointed in order to set them apart to serve the Lord and to lead his people. There were 19 Israelite kings in the line of David.

And the promise to David that we read in 2 Samuel chapter 7 verse 16 was, and I quote, What Peter is confessing is that Jesus is the promised one who is anointed to reign from the line of King David forever.

Although the Davidic kingdom had been decimated due to sin and wickedness from David's own lineage from men like Solomon, Rehoboam, Ahaz, Manasseh, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah.

Jesus is the final anointed and promised one who would sit upon David's throne. And he would make Israel a great and mighty nation once again, who would then shine the light to the world. But Peter not only confesses Jesus to be the great and mighty king from David's throne, he says that Jesus is the son of the living God.

[2 : 49] What does the phrase son of the living God mean? Some have suggested that Jesus is not God. Only a man adopted into a relationship with God the Father.

Therefore, Jesus is a mere man who demonstrated God-like virtues or behavior. Such teaching is condemned because it fails to truly understand the relationship between the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Let me try to explain this in somewhat of a practical way. And I do this with fear and trembling.

Anytime you talk about the Trinity, you're talking about a great mystery.

I have four wonderful kids. They were born fully human. They possess life, breath, DNA, the ability to choose, and so forth.

Although I'm their father, I am not more human than they are. We share in this gift of life as human beings. That is our essence and our nature.

[4 : 02] We are human beings made in the image of God. I and my wife, their mother, are called to lead and order our family life. But we are not somehow more human than our children.

Now, Jesus is the Son of God because He came from the Father. Although He came to this earth being born of the Virgin Mary, He, unlike all of us, existed before His earthly birth.

And that's where my analogy about the family breaks down. Jesus is eternal with the Father.

Therefore, he is begotten, not made, as we say in the Creed.

The Father is the source, but the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternal. Proceeding from the Father, sharing in this eternal and divine love.

We participate in this love as we are incorporated into Christ as members of his body. And that begins in holy baptism.

[5 : 11] We are adopted into this eternal communion of love shared between Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is eternal. That is, transcends time or space.

Only the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are divine. One in being or essence. Yet they are three distinct persons who are bound together in love.

And love is not some feeling, it's not some emotion. It is the giving of oneself for another. That's what love is. We now share in this eternal self-giving love between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Receiving and participating in the God who became man, the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus, who is both Lord and God. Now, I know this could be a bit heady.

Head starts spinning a little bit. So let's make this even more practical by focusing on Peter's confession. Peter proclaims that Jesus is not only a king in the sense of some political dynasty as heir of David's throne.

[6 : 27] He is the eternal God who proceeded from the Father, who has now become flesh. The second person of the Holy Trinity came in human flesh.

Jesus is the Son of God, never created, but who proceeded eternally from the Father. And because of this great confession, our Lord blesses Peter.

And he says this revelation and this confession that Peter gave came from the Father, who is the source of all. But here's where the sermon even gets a little bit more practical.

It's one thing to be aware of such profound truth that Jesus is the eternal God, never created. He is the great I am who has existed from all eternity.

But it's quite another to confess and then order our lives around such belief. But that is exactly what St. Peter did.

[7 : 33] Did he stumble in his belief? Yes, just like you and I do. Did he recoil under pressure? Yes, he did.

But this same confession of who Jesus is became the life and the ministry of St. Peter to the world. He and the other disciples just two chapters later in Matthew chapter 18 were given the keys of the kingdom.

Jesus told them that they were to bind and to loose, meaning they would forgive and retain the sins of people, depending upon whether people were willing to repent and follow Christ.

Peter preached. He taught. He baptized. He baptized. He forgave sins. Having the full authority and commission of our Lord.

He and the other apostles would be the hands, the feet, the mouth of Jesus. He would gather people from all over the world into an eternal kingdom, confessing Jesus as Lord, as Christ, and as God.

[8 : 51] But St. Peter's ministry did not stop there. Around AD 64, after the great fire broke out in Rome, Christians were wrongfully accused of setting the imperial city ablaze.

The emperor Nero, who was completely insane and ruthless, who many believe that actually started the fire.

He ordered the executions of many, many Christians. Peter was already in prison at this time. And now it was time for him to give his life for the very confession that he gave here in Matthew chapter 16.

St. Peter, like his Lord, was placed upon a cross. He was then hung upside down as a way of ridiculing him and his belief.

The later bishop of Rome, St. Clement, who served less than 30 years after St. Peter, wrote the following about his predecessor.

[10 : 03] Through envy, the greatest and most just pillars of the church were persecuted and came even unto death. Peter, through unjust envy, endured not one or two, but many, many sufferings.

And at last, having delivered his confession, he departed unto the place of glory due to him.

Friends, this is why we celebrate the lives of the saints.

Despite the failures and foibles of the great men and women throughout history, in them we see the life of Jesus through their devotion, their faith, their love, and in the ultimate act of love, giving their own lives for Christ.

Peter's confession was not just mere assent to the claims of who Jesus is. The demons assent. The demons acknowledge. The demons know the truth of who Jesus is.

Despite Peter's weaknesses and failings, he came to be restored by our Lord. And he proclaimed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

[11 : 25] And he so believed this, that he was hung upside down on a cross in complete humiliation, where his earthly life would end.

And where the glory of God would shine through this faithful man, as he pointed all to Jesus, the Son of the living God.

The encouragement that we can take from this is simply that Peter's faith should be our faith as well.

We all fail. We are broken people. We all fail. But friends, God's love never fails. And you need to hear that.

Therefore, let us not put our hope in earthly political powers that will fail. They will fail.

[12 : 22] All kingdoms of this earth will fall. Let us not put our hope in countries or systems that operate on a might makes right ethic that is demonic to its core.

Let us not put our hope in money and in the things of this world following the way of unrepentant Judas that leads to despair and causes us to forfeit our own souls for the enticements of this world. Instead, let us confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And may we live our lives ordering all that we are and all that we do and all that we have around the kingdom of God.

This is the lesson that St. Peter teaches us not only through his words, but through his actions. This is the life we are called to honor by following his example.

As we make our way to the glory that is revealed in Christ Jesus, who is both Lord and God. Amen.

[13 : 42] In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.