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Today we celebrate the Feast Day of St. Peter, the patron saint of our parish, the leader of the Disciples after Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, the Bishop of Rome, the first Pope. But in the character of St. Peter, which we discover in the Gospels, we are reminded of the Holy Spirit's gifts, of the marvelous diversity found in the saints of God, and how God can and does transform lives for the building up of His Kingdom. According to the Gospels, St. Peter was not always a saint. Simon Peter was an ordinary fisherman from Bethsaida. The Scriptures tell us that Simon Peter was uneducated, and while accompanying Jesus he was often prone to angry outbursts, especially when Jesus prophesied His impending suffering, crucifixion, and death. Peter's anger was met with stern rebukes from Jesus. Simon Peter is also the man who in the night Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane drew his sword and cut off a servant's ear. Peter had a temper, and yet he was not brave enough to follow Jesus throughout the Lord's trial and crucifixion but kept his distance and denied any association with the Lord three times. After the Resurrection, Peter hid along with the rest of the disciples, he ran with St. John to see the empty tomb, but walked away from the tomb wondering, perhaps with skepticism, what had happened to the body of Jesus.

The Gospels present Peter not only as quick tempered but as a rather dense man. One of the jokes in the Gospels is that Jesus nickname Simon Peter, "Petros" meaning "Rocky" which we have anglicized as "Peter." But in this imperfect, quick tempered, and uneducated man, the Scriptures also record the recipient of a most profound and lasting conversion. In today's Gospel Jesus asks His disciples, *who do men say that I am?* They answer, *some say that you are John the Baptist, some the prophet Elijah.* Jesus then asks, *but who do you say that I am?* And from Simon Peter, perhaps the most uneducated of the group, who if he knew any of the prophets or the law knew it by hearing, says, *thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* Upon this confession of faith Jesus says, *blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jonah for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, [thou art Petros] and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* From the disciple who was so dense that he was nicknamed "Rocky" comes forth of the most profound revelations of who Jesus is in the Gospels.

The Scriptures' presentation of Simon Peter's character is also profound in that it presents the good and the bad, the perfect and the imperfect. Here we see

a man uneducated, who recognizes the Son of God and whom the Prophets have prophesied of for a thousand years. Yet this same man cannot stand the thought of our Lord's crucifixion and wants to defend his Lord with the sword. We witness Simon Peter pulled back and forth between faith and fear. He is a man who often allowed himself to be ruled by his passions. We see this during the trial and Crucifixion of Jesus with his three denials of ever having known the Lord, and then after the Resurrection, while fishing and seeing the Lord standing on the bank of the lake of Galilee is so excited that he jumps out of the boat and swims ashore leaving the boat behind. There on the lake shore Peter declares his love for Jesus when our Lord asks him three times, *Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Peter said to Him, yes, Lord you know that I love you. Jesus says to Him, feed my lambs.* Peter confesses three times of his love for Christ, just as he denied the Lord three times. And yet, again, Peter is torn, Peter is confused and Peter is hurt by Jesus when Jesus asks him over and over again about whether he will follow him or not. The Scriptures record that Peter was grieved by the continual questioning. Next, Jesus prophesies to him of his death. And at the news of his own eventual martyrdom, he turns to wonder about his spiritual brother John. Peter is always himself. He is torn, he is confused, and he is always divided between good and evil. He wonders about the fate of his brother John, and yet, he ignores the ominous prophecy of his own. Peter is indeed so very human. *What about John? What will happen to him?*

St. Peter is a good patron saint, because like many of the saints, he could be a difficult, grumpy, and angry person. He was a part of our Lord's inner circle of disciples and yet he had serious character flaws. It is a wonder that in spite of his many character flaws and defects, even in spite of not being trained in the Law of Moses or the Scriptures, that he recognizes Jesus for who he is: *the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* It is startling that Jesus proclaims that upon Peter's confession of faith He will build His Church. With the Gospel accounts alone, we might think that Peter's confession of faith is not that meaningful. But it is not until the Book of Acts where we really begin to see why Jesus said that Peter would have an important role to play in the building of His Church. In the second chapter of Acts, right after Pentecost, Peter stands before a crowd of over three thousand people and preaches an eloquent sermon, so learned and so powerful that on that very day over three thousand souls were baptized and added to the Church. What was the transforming moment for this uneducated fisherman from Bethsaida? Peter was indeed broken in his own betrayal of Christ at the Crucifixion. Next, he was bewildered and confronted by the Empty Tomb. Next, Peter was transformed by

the descent of the Holy spirit at Pentecost. He was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, and even though he was uneducated, yet through the power and revelation of the Holy Spirit all of the Scriptures were revealed to him and he was emboldened to preach the Gospel. His life was forever changed, and he indeed became a saint, confessor, and martyr for Jesus Christ and His Church.

St. Peter is proof to us that God can make each one of us saints. He is proof that even the most confused, unlearned, passionate, and hot tempered among us can be used by God and transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into heroes for the faith. There are many saints of God but *one Spirit and one hope, one Lord, one Faith and one Baptism, one God and Father of us all,*" and yet we are reminded that our holy calling is expressed in many ways. Thankfully, God is infinitely patient and merciful with us, thankfully He has given St. Peter the keys to the Kingdom, which have been passed down even to our own parish. God is using this parish to mold us and transform us into His saints. So let us cling to the rock of St. Peter's faith and *count it all joy; Let patience have her perfect work.* That rock will not fail us; we have our Savior's promise that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* Amen.