

## PART ONE: RUNNING WITH PETER

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord, and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

This meditation initiates a three-part series on the Resurrection of Jesus in connection with the Apostle Peter. These meditations will contemplate the dialogues and the relation Jesus had with Peter and vice versa. And I would title this period of prayer as *Peter the Runner* because the opening act of Peter's encounter with Jesus resurrected, or at least the empty tomb, is Peter running to the Lord. And when the Lord is sighted on the shore as Peter was fishing with his brother and the two sons of Zebedee, it's Peter who lunges out of the boat and runs to shore- swim, run, etc. And everything is for our own personal consumption in the Gospel, there's nothing extraneous. But to put this eagerness Peter had to be with the Lord, we need to contemplate his personality, his character traits. Of all the Apostles, his personality sticks out the most. Well, it also helps that he was selected to be the rock on which Jesus' kingdom would be built, on which his Church would be built. So, it stands to reason that Peter gets the most coverage given his future position.

And I would also say, given his personality, it jumps off the page, he had a big personality. He had a huge heart that needed the elevation of grace, needed formation, needed humbling, but nevertheless, the raw material was definitely there. The Lord chose Peter for a good reason, using both his qualities and his defects to initiate the first evangelization that also can be called the new evangelization. He will be, after the Resurrection in a more official way, the- the rock, the official representative of Jesus, the Vicar of Christ. He will act in his place. He will have a unique position in the Church. He's not one more bishop, he is a bishop, but he has authority over the whole Church.

And- but we need to look at the background to appreciate his relationship with Jesus after the Resurrection. Peter is the recipient of the Lord's most severe rebuke- a rebuke can't get worse than that. Peter is called nothing less than Jesus' arch-enemy. Peter, with a lot of goodwill, albeit without much supernatural outlook, understandably so. If my beloved friend and mentor and teacher said that he's going to go to Milwaukee or Des Moines- I wish I could choose a neutral city- Chicago and be brutally killed and that execution will be preceded by merciless torture and humiliation, I would say, please don't go to that city. But nevertheless he received a severe rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan.

Your thoughts are thoughts of men and not of God.” And the Lord doesn't just rebuke someone for nothing, he should have known that this terrible suffering and death was the secret of our redemption, of our liberation, of our entrance into the definitive Promised Land. But nevertheless, he received that very severe rebuke.

But perhaps closer to home this is more comprehensible, it's Peter who arrogantly compared himself to his brother Apostles. In essence, he declared that he was better than they were, that his loyalty was more enduring, his fidelity more profound, the quality of his discipleship was of a higher quality than those of his fellow disciples. And he said that even if the rest denied him or were unfaithful, he would not, even if- even at the cost of his life, that he would never be unfaithful to the Lord because the Lord told Peter again... first he says, "Get behind me, Satan." And then he says, "Simon, Simon, Satan will sift you like wheat." And then Jesus predicts Peter's ultimate fidelity, but he will sift him like wheat. And when he declared that he would be- be faithful, even if the rest were not, then Jesus again, in a veiled way, corrects Peter for his arrogance, for his presumption, for comparing himself and declaring himself better, predicts that- that he will deny him three times. Before the cock crows, he will deny him three times. Before the cock crows twice, he will deny him three times. It doesn't get worse than that. Judas has him beat, obviously. But here this great faithful disciple curses and swears that he has nothing to do with Jesus, the Messiah, that's cited in St. Mark. Tradition has it that it's a compilation of sermons delivered by Peter. So, the- Mark's gospel enjoys a special accuracy. And Peter looks especially bad in that gospel because it comes from the horse's mouth, etc.

And so, after- and again, he- there's good raw material, he has a big heart, we have to also appreciate that he lived with God three years. He- for- he got very intense formation from no one less than the Incarnate God. And he was going to lead in establishing this Kingdom on behalf of Jesus after receiving the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But again, we see Peter's weakness. He, now with James and John, he's invited to pray with Jesus in his last major time of prayer which is going to be a very painful time of prayer, a prayer that literally will result in blood, sweat, and tears- copious tears, copious sweat, copious blood. Jesus is human in every way except he's immune to temptation to sin. But he's human in every way, he's like us in everything but sin.

And it's definitely a human reaction when you're suffering and undergoing dread and fear, you don't want be alone. And Jesus essentially begs these three special apostles who are invited to pray with him on that rock in the Garden of Gethsemane, to stay awake, be alert, watch and pray. Jesus tells them, "Watch and pray so that you may not enter into temptation." Temptation to what? To steal, to lie, to miss celebrating the Sabbath? No, in this case, the temptation to disbelieve in the Cross, to throw it down, to fail to embrace it, to not have the will or the desire to learn the science of the Cross which is indispensable for every disciple of Christ and to believe in it and to embrace one's cross is impossible without the aid of grace obtained through profound prayer.

So, Peter is there. We see him nodding off, sleeping, in spite of Jesus' pleas to stay awake. And subsequent to this hour of intense prayer that put Jesus in an agony, but he was strengthened nevertheless, and now he's arrested. And what does Peter do? Basically, Peter tries to kill a man. He becomes enraged. He's a loyal friend, at least he thinks he is, and he loves Jesus humanly, very intensely, Jesus' first love. And he attacks the servant of the high priest, Malchus. It's late at night... I don't think he- Peter said to himself, in his impulsive rage, I'm gonna just slice off his ear to teach him a lesson. It seems like he went for his head. Most likely the man ducked, didn't duck quick enough, and Peter sliced his ear off, which meant Peter gave him a severe blow. So- and Jesus reprimands Peter. Maybe the other disciples who are trying to defend Jesus against the authorities who were arresting him or the soldiers who were putting his hands in chains and roughly jostling him back to the house of the high priest. And Jesus says, "He who lives by the sword dies by the sword," in different versions, but Jesus definitely reprimands him that this is not his- his way. I mean, his way is to turn the other cheek, not to ever resort to violence, to conquer through love, etc.

And Peter then follows Jesus from a distance, the Gospel says, that would be another meditation, but he follows him from a distance, because Scriptural writers say because he wasn't united to him through prayer. Again, relying on his human qualities, his human courage, and he winds up denying Christ. At the provocation of the servant girl, denies him three times. In the Gospel of St. Luke, when Jesus is being brought to Pilate, or brought to prison, Peter- Peter's eyes or Jesus' eyes met Peter's eyes, and there was- there were- those were eyes of forgiveness, of mercy, of unconditional love, and Peter is cited to have wept bitterly. Peter, that big heart that will not go to waste. But that heart needs to be spiritualized or supernaturalized.

Alright. We needed to contemplate this background to appreciate Peter the Runner. We can't just segue into Peter the Runner without, at least in a cursory way, contemplating his demeanor, his actions, his reception of reprimands from Jesus from the get go. And he's always getting reprimanded but in a loving way given his need to be well formed to lead the Church. Now Jesus has died on the Cross, he has resurrected, and St. Luke says that- that Peter ran to the tomb. Let me read a little bit of the Resurrection scene: "Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary, the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the Apostles," i.e. the Resurrection, "But these words seem to them an idle tale and they did not believe them. But Peter rose and ran to the tomb. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves and he went home wondering at what he- what had happened."

And we turn to the Gospel of St. John 20:4, but let me read some verses preceding his depiction of being a runner: "Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken

the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him.' Peter then came out with the other disciple and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first, and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb and he saw that linen cloth is lying and the napkin which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself." And so he's running. John was younger– I wouldn't be surprised if Peter was out of shape, perhaps overweight, whatever, but he's running. He's impulsive, but it's- his impulse is driven by his ardent love for Jesus. And lastly, he's not running but it's even more incisive about his ardent heart for Jesus.

And now the scene is Jesus on the shore fixing breakfast for the- these fishermen, apostles of his, and- and Jesus is shouting at them from the shore: "Just as the day was breaking Jesus stood on the beach yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, have you any fish?' They answered him, 'No.' He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' So they cast it and now they were not able to haul it in for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' When Peter- when Simon Peter heard this, it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from land, but about one hundred yards off." So again, Peter jumps into the water and he is too impatient to row that boat in just one hundred yards. He needed to run to the shore to be with Jesus.

What can I draw from this? I need to translate that running attitude when it comes to life of piety. We ask Our Lord during this prayer and perhaps, through St. Peter's intercession, that at least in a spiritual sense, in terms of my attitude and disposition, that I run to the Eucharist, that I run to the tabernacle, that I run to my time of contemplation, that I run to the Rosary, that I run to that image of the Cross, that the high point of my day is my spiritual life, the high points of my day are my acts of piety– perhaps not with an emotional impulse, but a deeper one of the heart. We could tell Our Lord, I want that big heart for you. Why did Peter run? They love Our Lord. Yes, it could have been more spiritual, it could have been with more faith, it could have been with more humility. But nevertheless, that heart is there and I also want to have that kind of enthusiasm in dealing with Jesus Christ.

The successor of St. Josemaria, Bl. Alvaro– and I noticed in one of his biographies, I think I read two, but I think in both of them, that no matter what activities marked his day, the high point of his day was his spiritual plan for sanctity, for holiness, which he- we can call- St. Josemaria called the plan of life, the plan of life in Christ. And with his busy schedule, and busy he was, working in the Vatican, being the Prelate of Opus Dei, trying to carry out St. Josemaria's mission when he left this Earth, he would always want to know when he could do his hour of prayer, when he could do

his Rosary, when will he be able to say Mass. He said this was his high point of the day. And he would say those acts of piety. It's hard to translate because I heard it with my own ears- he would say, you need to- probably the best way to translate it, to mount them, to frame them, to make a fuss over them. And even, you know, we could use our- an icon of sanctity, Mother Teresa, that she was so devoted to the most neglected individuals of our society, the poorest of the poor. But before she dealt with the poorest of the poor, she was on her knees or sitting down before that tabernacle. She ran in her own way to Our Lord.

And when I postpone my acts of piety, if I have them scheduled in and I postpone them because I have something better to do or more “pressing”, and sometimes we do, without getting scrupulous, but most of the time we probably don't- that could be a little wake up call. I'm not running, I'm walking slowly to the Lord. Or, when routine creeps in and I'm not really seeking the Lord, I'm getting it done, it's something, but the heart isn't there. I guess Peter's running could be translated as *heart- my heart isn't there*. I'm routinely getting the Rosary finished or I'm spending the time I've designated in prayer or my Mass has distractions that are not always involuntary but voluntary, at least implicitly, because, you know, I'm figuring out some logistics, I'm thinking about a meeting or I'm worrying about some unresolved issue- whatever it is, I need to detect when I am not running.

I think another example, and I wind down this time of prayer, when poor St. John Paul was shot and he had to undergo, you know, a very long surgery, you know, I think it took ten hours or maybe even more, and he woke up and he asked his secretary when was he going to finish his breviary, when was he going to finish night prayer, and that he had not done his Litany of Loreto to Our Lady, he didn't remember doing it. And his secretary kindly said, well, you know, Your Holiness, a whole day has gone by. I mean, this is the next day.

So, that is sort of attitude I want to have as I celebrate the Resurrection. Jesus is alive, he's with me. He has overcome death, he has overcome suffering and he is here, albeit invisibly, but very present in- at least in terms of my heart, in terms of my attitude, in terms of my eagerness. When it comes to piety, when it comes to doing his will, I want to metaphorically or allegorically run to him. Mary, pray for us, that we learn to deal with your Son with your kind of eagerness, with St. Joseph's eagerness, manifested in punctuality, manifested in a determination to make a good time of prayer, manifested in a desire to give him glory.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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