

PART THREE: FEED MY SHEEP

REV. PETER ARMENIO

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, 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 concludes our three-part series on St. Peter's intimate relationship with the resurrected Christ. A lot transpired as Our Lord conversed with Peter. Immediately after Jesus- Peter's act of contrition, in fact, after each act of contrition, the Lord, for the first time, he says, "Feed my lambs." He- he says that twice in a row and then, when Peter says, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you," "Feed my sheep." And that stands to reason because only a profound act of contrition, act of humility, would allow us to be able to witness the light of Jesus and to preach him primarily by example but also by our word. And without me, you could do nothing. And when we make- those are- that's a statement Jesus made. Peter obviously heard that very clearly during the Last Supper. And, what does that mean in the practice? It's- it's a sentiment we need to have and we need to keep going deeper and deeper into that sentiment, without me you can do nothing. And the expression of profound contrition based on tangible evidence of our sinfulness, it's not a negative, it's a positive because we're essentially saying, Lord, I am sorry, I can't do it on my own. Fill me with your love, with your humility, with your strength. And so, an evangelizer is a good repenter. An effective evangelizer is a person who has come to the profound realization that without Jesus we could do nothing, that the power comes from Jesus himself through the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

After Peter's triple act of contrition, "Lord, you know that I love you," you know, at the end, "you know all things, you know that I love you," Jesus makes a prediction and it's going to be intimately linked with his effectiveness as an evangelizer. Evangelization is all about witness, and the Greek word for *witness* means- is *martyr*, that's the Greek word. Maybe the- the precise pronunciation is mar-tor, but that's where we get the word martyr. And *martyr* means the ultimate witness of dying for your faith but also the witness of holiness, of charity. The word *martyr* also corresponds to that kind of Christian example. And after Peter makes this act of contrition, now the Lord also assures Peter, you were afraid, you were cowardly. Now that you've allowed me to fill you with my grace through your repentance, I'm going describe your particular witness.

And Jesus says the following. After he says, "Feed my sheep," he says, "Truly, truly I say to you." And when Jesus precedes something with an amen, amen, or truly, truly, depending on the translation, he says, I really want you to listen to this. "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would. But when you're old, you will stretch out your hands and another will gird you and carry

you where you do not wish to go." This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God. After this, he said to him, "Follow me."

And, let's unpack these prophetic words of Jesus. To illustrate this, we see that Peter has a very particular and a very prominent and powerful role in evangelization. He led the first evangelization being the head of the Church— St. Paul doing a lot of the legwork, but he led it. We read his Epistles. It seems like he had an editor or a ghostwriter, but he signed it like any Pope will do for a Vatican document, but it comes from him. And we notice the— the profundity, that there's been a radical change in Peter. He did not speak this way. And in fact, the first reaction his audience or his congregation had in Jerusalem when he was infused with the Holy Spirit on the occasion of Pentecost, they thought that he was drinking, that there was a certain transformation and they were kind of astonished because these apostles, Peter being the leader, were not educated. So, the message did not exactly correspond to the social status, the educational background of Peter. So, there's a profound change in Peter, driven in significant part by his humility now and his repentance and Our Lord now working through him by virtue of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit.

When you go to St. Peter's, you— the experience in itself is an experience of transcendence, of divine power. And we see that these two apostles, Peter and Paul, are basically the main character. Peter is, but then in the secondary way, but you know, in a very noticeable way, St. Paul. In fact, the entrance to that Church, the biggest Church in the world, biggest Catholic Church, you see Paul with a sword in his hand, big sword, they both look like incredible hulks, and Peter with these huge keys in his hands. And the evangelizer of the Gentiles and the leader of the Church, the keys stand for his authority and the sword does not stand for violence but the Word of God that cuts through the bone and the marrow, that Jesus' words are like a two edged sword penetrating the heart. This is a metaphor, a graphic image of the power of the words of Jesus. And Paul was the doctor of the Gentiles, someone who commented in a very deep way the gospel and the teachings of Jesus.

But when you go there, the whole Church speaks of witness. I embarrassed myself a bit in one of my many visits to St. Peter's Church. I had a little bit more extra time, and usually do not have extra time on my business to Rome, usually it's not— it's for pastoral business. But anyway, I had some time, I was able to pray at leisure, and I was staring at the ceiling of the sanctuary, you know, many big churches could fit in that sanctuary. And I said, this crucifixion scene which was, you know, it's a mosaic— everything's a mosaic, all the artwork is a mosaic, it looked a little odd, this crucifixion scene. I said, first of all, the crucifix looks odd. I was by myself so I didn't share it, now I'm sharing it. And I said, where are the two criminals on his right and his left? And I said, let me get a little closer. So I walked into the sanctuary and looked directly up and finally, I noticed that the victim on the cross is upside down. And then it was an ah-ha moment, a light went on. I knew this already, but I didn't connect the dots— that is St. Peter who's undergoing a crucifixion. In American lingo, we could say on Vatican Hill, adjacent to the Circus Maximus, where many Christians were martyred. And tradition has it, and I firmly believe in that tradition, that Peter requested that the executioner crucify him upside down because he felt unworthy to be crucified like the Master, like Jesus Christ. Hence they were not— he was not crucified with criminals.

And then, I was also informed why that obelisk is in the middle of St. Peter's Square, you know, an unsavory emperor, most of them were, brought that obelisk, Caligula, from ancient Egypt. They conquered Egypt in a battle or a series of battles, and one of the trophies was that big obelisk that they brought to Rome and erected that obelisk on Vatican Hill. And why is it there, this pagan symbol right in the middle of St. Peter's Square? Well, because it was looked at by Peter when he was being crucified, that was the last object he saw. So, hence the obelisk is there, but that's not the only- you could almost genuflect, I wouldn't recommend it, you know, we need to be natural. But on top of that, on the tippy top of that obelisk is a small piece of the Cross that Jesus died on. So, that obelisk has meaning. And even that experience of St. Peter's Church is also a source of discipleship, of evangelization.

Let's ask the Lord as we make our prayer, as we meditate on Peter's relationship with the resurrected Jesus, feed my lambs, feed my sheep. And the whole idea of witness, it's a prominent word- yes, we have to preach to all nations, but the more prominent word is prove that Jesus is real, witness him, be a witness. We are not called to a martyrdom that involves shedding blood- maybe some of us are, but we were all called to martyrdom which means *witness*. And even all the contemporary popes, I think, from Paul VI, he was the one who emphasized that- that the world needs witnesses of Christ, that's reiterated by St. John Paul, that we have to reveal the face of Jesus. Benedict reaffirmed that. Francis emphasizes that heavily with transmitting the joy of Christ, the peace of Christ, the mercy of Christ, carrying out an apostolate of attraction, encounter, accompaniment. There's all different angles to contemplate witness.

St. Josemaria, in his celebrated meditation book, *The Way of the Cross*, he states that there's two kinds of martyrdoms. One is the standard martyrdom of dying for your faith, at times through torture, so being violently killed on the count of one's faith, and then the daily self-giving, day in and day out, giving ourselves in ways that will not make the headlines in the ordinary but running up an innumerable number of deeds of love, not in an erotic way but in the way of love- your faithful it little, you are faithful in much, we're doing it out of love.

St. Josemaria experienced both. He was on- he was- they were hunting him down. There was one episode when he was- he should have been martyred but these malicious people didn't go up into the attic to search for people in hiding, you know, that's the first place you look for- you explore, but that didn't happen- miraculous. He was- he revealed that he was a priest. He heard- he gave absolution to his- his companions in that attic during the Spanish Civil War and, you know, he was morally certain that he was going to be executed. They thought they had executed him. But they mis- they mistook him for somebody else. And obviously, that rattled him for the rest of his life. He prayed for that priest who died in his place. But anyway, the whole experience of the Civil War made martyrdom very real to him. And then the ordinary, so he did both, and he claims, you know, it's not infallible dogma, but he claims that the martyrdom of self-giving, day in and day out, in a whole myriad of ways, to him it's just as heroic or even more heroic than that one shot, death for the faith.

So, witness applies to that ordinary self-giving. And what- why is this so important, this martyrdom of the ordinary? Because we need to make Jesus real. We're in a culture, just like Peter's culture, just like the culture of the early Christians, a culture of skepticism, of indifference, of violence, of moral relativism, of sexual perversity, where natural law is not only rejected but seen as inimical to human fulfillment, to natural joy or quality of life, whatever you want to call it. And so, we need to witness and show that our product is the real product. I ask the Lord for forgiveness to- I don't mean to sound disrespectful, but I want to make a point, and our product is nothing less than perfect God and perfect man superimposed on ourselves. As Paul says, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

We- Jesus needs disciples, and I see both old and young, but I'm always encouraged by seeing young people witnessing their faith. And those followers of Christ, you know, we're all flawed, we all have imperfections, we all slip and fall, but those young people and older people who have given themselves to Christ. And what do I mean by that? Do I mean that they've, you know, run off and become hermits? You know, that's a valid vocation, but that's not for everybody. Or they run off and join, you know, a very strict religious order? Some do and God bless them, we need that. But also, similar, not the same, obviously, it's an impossible bar to reach- just like St. Joseph, just like the Blessed Mother, just like Jesus in his hidden life, you have people who- young people, older people, who- the Mass is the center of their day. They make all sorts of sacrifices to go to Mass.

She doesn't know, maybe in the afterlife, she'll know, I was stopped- I was at a stop sign and there was a church about 300 or- or 200 yards in front of me, and a view of the wooden stairs going up to the entrance. It was sleeting out. This woman was probably, you know, I would venture to guess, you know, maybe in her 70s and she was holding on to the banister, pulling herself up those stairs, going slowly. The stop sign, and then I was able to pass, and I said, my gosh, what a witness- that's martyrdom. What a sacrifice this woman is going through to go to Mass. It's a great bargain. We need faith for that, though. There are people who devote time for quiet conversation with Jesus. There are people who push themselves out of their comfort zones and make more friends. There's no ulterior motive, but the ulterior motive is to love people with the heart of Christ in the hopes that this love, this witness, will draw them to the truth. The truth is not a theory. The truth is not a book. The truth is not a formula. The truth is a person.

And Peter, Jesus said he'd witness- he mentions that he's going to be chained. We see then in the Acts of the Apostles, he was chained- he was chained twice, and then under Nero's persecution of the Church, that was the first- the first persecution, I think was St. Paul's orchestration of the persecution of the first converts in Jerusalem, but the first major persecution throughout the empire was engineered by Nero making the capital offense and he put the early Christians through grisly tortures. And Peter and Paul died under Nero and they- the persecution would always involve primarily, not exclusively, I mean, the great majority were lay people who died for their faith, but they would definitely polish off the hierarchy as best they could. I think virtually no popes survived during those first 300 years. And Peter lead, he initiated himself through his witness, that age of martyrdom, that right now as we make our prayer, we become beneficiaries of this.

To illustrate the need for witness let me read this point in *The Forge* by St. Josemaria— bear with me and I will finish up. We can even ask Our Lord to ingrain these sentiments in our own hearts and minds asking also for St. Peter's intercession. St. Josemaria says the following, "Committed, how much I like that word, we children of God freely put ourselves under an obligation to live a life of dedication to God, striving that he may have complete and absolute sovereignty over our lives." That's one point under the heading of *Selection*. The next point, and I'll finish with this, "Whenever sanctity is genuine, it overflows from its vessel to fill the hearts of the souls with its supernatural abundance. We, the children of God, sanctify ourselves by sanctifying others. Is Christian life growing around you? Consider this every day." And we put these sentiments, these ideas, we ask the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of Our Lady, that we could come up with a concrete game plan to imitate the witness and the spirit of evangelization of St. Peter and the early Christians.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have 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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