

Last Sunday Simon became Peter as he identified Jesus as the “...Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (*Mt 16:16*) and was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. (*Mt 16:18-19*) This Sunday, the very next paragraph in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus calls him ‘Satan’ and tells him to get out of his way. (*Mt 16:23*)

What just happened? How and why did Peter go from a person full of grace, inspired by God the Father to identify the Son of God, the one described by St. John as Love (*1Jn 4:16*) to have Jesus call him the prince of darkness (*Mt 16:23*) and cast him behind his back like yesterday’s trash?

We all have a prism by which we view the world. No matter how hard we try set it aside, no matter how much we try to deny it’s effect, the experiences of our lives color our view of the world and the people around us. Using this prism we can come up with some serious tomfoolery, even to the point where we won’t emerge from our basements without some form of wired colander on our heads to keep the ultra magic waves from affecting our brain.

Then we have the media trying to tell us how and what to think. Not just the news, but in stories, the fiction we watch and read, video games, and social media. Although it has a friendlier face, George Orwell’s 1984 is alive and well in the year 2020.

Such is what happened to Peter. He allowed the influences of his society to dictate his response to Our Lord describing his Passion and Death. In his society, health, wealth and a long and fruitful life were seen as signs of God’s favor. To the Jews of that age, the wealthy were blessed by God, and for whatever reason, the people of that age, and of this age as well look down on the poor.

But Jesus is in the process of turning society on its proverbial ear. Peter was there for the Sermon on the Mount. Remember, Blessed are the Poor in spirit, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are those who mourn? (*Mt 5:1-12*) Our Lord was presenting a radical view that was and is diametrically opposed to the societal norm.

Peter isn’t connecting the dots, and looked at Jesus through the eyes of the world. All he can see is terror, torture, shame and disgrace. He sees his friend, his mentor, his God, a person he loves dying in the most horrific

manner known to man. He sees this kind of suffering and death as an ultimate evil and it shakes him to the core.

Peter being Peter, once again says exactly the wrong thing, which is exactly what we would say in the same circumstances given what Peter knew at the time. We would say the wrong thing because just like Peter, we have a hard time connecting the dots. We, like Peter in this Gospel would rather react with emotion than apply critical thinking to our response. Critical thinking is tough, not because it is particularly difficult but because it often leads to the second part of today's Gospel. (*Mt 16:24-27*) It requires us to pick up our Cross. Even if it only demands that we lift a small corner, like to hold our temper, or to arrive at the conclusion that what we desire in the moment isn't appropriate. The demand, the cross is still there.

Peter is a man of passion and commitment. He is gruff and abrupt but he balances that with a tender heart. One may conclude that his abruptness and gruffness are his way of protecting his tender heart to keep from being hurt. Our Lord uses these attributes that he gave him to build this, his Church.

Within every great sinner is a great Saint. In case you missed it the first time, within every great sinner is a great Saint. Peter was a great sinner. Some of his most egregious sins are documented for us in scripture. Peter is also counted among the greatest of all the Saints.

With Peter's leadership and prayers, the Church became is still the shining beacon of salvation for the entire world. Persecuted from without, rocked by scandal from within, throughout the ages the Bride of Christ endures bringing the truth of God's love and the hope of salvation to the world. A world in desperate need of an alternative answer because the answers provided by secular society cannot fulfill our deepest desire, our need for the love of Christ.

Our place? Where do we fit into this great scheme of creation? We too are sinners. We too fall into the trap of following the easy path; we too are reluctant to pick up our cross. But when we respond to grace, when we think things through, when we pick up our cross we will find that the burden is much lighter than we expect. It is much lighter and more satisfactory than the secular response because Jesus is with us and is carrying the majority of the load for us.