

The First Epistle of Saint Peter

Introduction to the First Epistle of Saint Peter

We know much about Saint Peter from the Gospel accounts and from the Book of Acts. He was a simple fisherman, the son of Jonah, and the brother of Saint Andrew who is the first called among the apostles. They were disciples of Saint John the Baptist who pointed them to our Lord Jesus Christ. They abandoned everything and followed our Lord.

It was Saint Peter who confessed that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, to which the Lord responded, *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”* (Matthew 16:17-18). This rock, of course, is Saint Peter’s confession of faith and not Saint Peter himself.

Saint Peter was both simple and zealous in his faith. When the Lord preached about the Holy Eucharist in John 6, many disciples stopped following Him, because His words were difficult for them. When the Lord asked the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?”, Saint Peter answered saying, *“Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”* (John 6:66-69). Although his faith was still being perfected as a disciple, out of his zealous love for Christ, he boldly went out on the water to walk with our Savior, and proclaimed that he would follow the Lord even to death shortly before His arrest and crucifixion.

Even when Saint Peter was rebuked by the Lord after saying His death should not happen, Saint Peter took the rebuke as profitable for instruction and continued to follow our Lord.

Along with Saint James and Saint John, the sons of Zebedee, Saint Peter had a special place within the circle of the twelve disciples. They were present on Mount Tabor and witnessed the glorious transfiguration. They also witnessed the raising of Jairus’ daughter from the dead and were with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The work of the Holy Spirit was very strong in Saint Peter. On the Feast of Pentecost, he cast his net and caught three thousand souls to Christ with a simple sermon. After healing the lame man at gate of the temple called Beautiful, Saint

Peter preached at Solomon's Porch and those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand (Acts 3: 1 - 4:4).

Saint Peter also performed other signs and wonders, to the point that even the sick were brought out into the streets and laid on beds and couches that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them (Acts 5:15-16). He healed Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years and was paralyzed (Acts 9:32-35). He raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36-43) and began the mission to the Gentiles with the baptism of Cornelius (Acts 10).

Saint Peter also suffered beatings and imprisonments. He was finally martyred in Rome by Nero and was crucified upside down, considering himself unworthy to suffer crucifixion in the same way as the Lord. Thus, Saint Peter truly obeyed the Lord's commandment to fish men with the net of the gospel. Instead of catching fish to their death, he caught men to eternal life.

Chapter 1 First Epistle of Saint Peter

Saint Peter wrote two epistles that are part of the New Testament. These epistles are numbered among the *Katholik* epistles, since they were not written to a specific church or person, but rather to the Jews and gentiles dispersed throughout the districts of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These had suffered much because of the persecutions instigated against them. The theme of this epistle is to rejoice in sharing the suffering of Christ.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied (1:1-2).

According to Eusebius of Caesarea, Saint Peter preached in these areas before his martyrdom in Rome. We can also contemplate that we are all pilgrims and sojourners in this world, until we reach our heavenly home. This hope gives us the inspiration to continue rejoicing in our sufferings.

Concerning the foreknowledge of God the Father, we can understand this in light of Saint Paul's words, "*just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself*" (Ephesians 1:4-5). This foreknowledge and desire that we be holy does not nullify our free will.

We are called to be set apart by the Holy Spirit. We who had once perished by our disobedience might now start to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, and by being sprinkled with His blood, we can now escape the power of Satan.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls (1:3-9).

When the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, He indeed showed mercy on us who were sinners and perishing. We were born anew in a living hope through the resurrection. Where once our nature became corrupt after the fall of mankind, now it has the possibility of rising in incorruption at the time of the general resurrection of the dead, in which we will rise in a glorified body, just as Christ also rose from the dead. This hope is the cause of our joy.

Even though you are persecuted, says Saint Peter, this persecution will become your glory. Because, just as the gold which is put into the fire comes out pure, you also be purified in the midst of your sorrows and persecutions and come out brighter, worthy to inherit salvation.

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into (1:10-12).

The mystery of salvation, which the prophets foretold, is so great that even the angels wish to know about it in detail.

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1:13-20).

How can we respond to this great gift of salvation that our Lord Jesus Christ has granted us? We must be watchful and sober, to rest our hope in Him. We must turn from our former lusts. As disobedience led to the fall of mankind, let us strive for obedience. Let us return to the holiness in which we were created in the beginning.

We must also have a certain measure of fear, and to perform those works that are according to His will. We were not redeemed with corruptible things or from traditions, but rather with the precious blood of Christ.

Christ existed eternally with the Father, and was manifested in the fullness of time when the world was ready to receive Him and that we might believe in the true God.

It might confuse us to hear that God raised the Son. This does not mean that the Son did not have the power to raise Himself. Certainly, He said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I shall raise it up again" and also, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again." Rather, we understand that the Father and the Son hold everything in common.

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word

of the LORD endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you (1:21-25).

The Holy Spirit sanctifies the heart and purifies the heart. It is only my striving toward purity of heart that we can begin to acquire the highest virtue of pure love for all. True purity comes from within. Through the incarnate Son, we gain incorrupt and immortal humanity.

Glory is due to God forever. Amen.