

Homily: Palm Sunday 2015: Cycle B: Is 50: 4-7; Ps. 22; Phil 2: 6-11; Mk 14: 1 – 15:47  
“Spiritual lessons from St. Peter”

After hearing these most powerful Scripture readings, may we pray for the grace to enter most deeply into this Holy Week, so the Lord can transform our hearts, minds, wills and lives in true holiness, to be a reflection of God Himself. I would like to reflect a bit on one person in the Passion narrative, in order to help us to put our lives in perspective, namely the person of **Peter**.

1. **Lesson one:** Reflecting on the life of Peter should give us all hope, for he often stumbled and bumbled through life; he was often well-intentioned in his words and actions but objectively off-base because of his own weaknesses that kept him from seeing the “real deal.” We observe this in the Passion narrative today. First off Peter promises Jesus that he will never deny his faith in Jesus, despite whatever difficulties he faces, even the threat of death. Jesus knows better and tells Peter that before the cock crows three times that night, Peter will three times deny his faith in Jesus. Why was Peter not able to keep his sincere resolution? **Pride.** Relying on one’s own strength rather than the Lord’s. The same happens in our own life: we often fall again and again into the same spiritual traps, the same sins, because we rely too much on ourselves, instead of the Lord’s almighty power. To be **humble** means to realize we need the Lord’s grace at every moment of every day to walk on the narrow path that leads to Him.
2. **Lesson two:** Peter fell not just because of his false sense of himself, which is pride, but also because he failed to **seriously pray** in a time of great trial! After the Last Supper, the first Mass, Jesus went out into **the Garden of Gethsemane** to pray and to literally take our sins into His heart and mind, imagination and will in order to become the true spiritual sacrifice of love for the human race’s redemption. It was an agony of such depth that he literally **sweated blood**. At this moment Peter and the other two chosen disciples: James and John were simply asked by Jesus to pray in support and solidarity with Him. It didn’t happen! Two times Jesus asked them to wake up and pray, and each time they failed the Lord.

It made Jesus even sadder. *Indeed the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak!* The lesson for us is so clear, but not always easy to implement: **when we are under duress we HAVE to pray, and pray long and hard.** This life truly is a spiritual battle, and there are many tests for us to endure and go through in order to arrive at the gates of Heaven victorious; and without the Lord as our commander in the battle, through prayer, it won't happen. **NEVER FORGET THAT TRUTH!**

3. **Lesson three:** Finally we see Peter in the actual courtyard and the servant girl there accuses him of being a follower of Jesus. Peter denies it not once, not twice, but three times with the added fireworks of swearing and cursing the third time to drive the point home. "*Me protesteth too much*", as Shakespeare would famously say. The girl knew he was with Jesus - why not admit it, Peter? Your Galilean accent gave you away, if nothing else. Well, **the spirit of cowardice** filled the heart of Peter. The **only way** we are not cowards, in the face of opposition to our Faith in Christ, is if we don't fail the first two tests which Peter unfortunately did: *by being proud and not praying sufficiently*, which then led to the cowardly acts in the face of real opposition. The counter to this is to ask God for the grace to grow in humility each day, to grow in an ever deeper and more consistent prayer life, and then and only then will we be able to be brave in the face of opposition, and be able to witness to others in whatever circumstance(s), emboldened with the spiritual gift of fortitude: *Yes I do believe in Jesus and everything the Catholic Church holds as true and necessary for my salvation.* It may seem like I am being a bit too hard on Peter in this homily. And if this was the end of the story, maybe so, but we now call him **St. Peter**, the first Pope of the Church. There's hope for us all! Never lose heart in the face of sin and weakness: just turn to the Lord in repentance, humility and prayer; and take advantage of the Lord's gift of mercy and healing in the **Sacrament of Reconciliation**. And then like Peter, after the Resurrection, we will also be brave enough to lay down our own lives for Jesus in big and small ways on the narrow path to the Kingdom. St. Peter, pray for us. And have a blessed Holy week - try to come to as many of the services as you can, as this truly is a week of special graces from the Lord for His people. God bless you.