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The Confession of Saint Peter

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“What Does This Mean?”

Text: Mark 8:27-35; 2 Peter 1:1-15; Acts 4:8-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I think Peter was excited. *He knew the answer!* Other people were saying all kinds of things about Jesus, but Peter knew who He was. So when Jesus then asks, ***But who do you say that I am?*** Peter jumps right in. I don't think it's that the others *didn't* know. I don't think they were all standing around, looking at each other, trying not to make eye contact with Jesus so He wouldn't call on them! I think they knew, too. But Peter . . . well, is Peter! So He jumps right in before the others can open their mouths. He answers for them all: ***You are the Christ.***

But while it's one thing to know the answer, it's quite another to know what it means. And Peter didn't know what it meant for Jesus to be the Christ. Because when Jesus starts teaching them, catechizing them about this, Peter takes Jesus aside and, Mark tells us, ***begins to rebuke Him.*** And Matthew, in his account, adds a few details to that, that Peter said: *No, Jesus! You're wrong. That's not what it means. That's never going to happen to you!*

Pretty bold! To say something like that to Jesus. So Jesus is just as forceful back. ***“Get behind me, Satan!”*** He says to Peter. ***“For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”*** Jesus calls Peter satan because this is the same thing satan did in the Garden with Adam and Eve. He told them, *No! You're wrong. Got didn't say that about this tree! That's not what that means . . .* Except He did say that, and meant it. Adam and Eve found that out the hard way.

What does this mean? That's the question of the Catechism. The question for catechumens to first ask their teacher, and then for their teacher to ask them. So that they can say the same thing. So they can *confess*. For that's what the word *confess* actually means: *to say the same thing*. Why do we say that we confess our sins? Because God's Word calls us sinners, and we *say the same thing*: Yes, I am a sinner. Why do we say that we confess the Creed? Because God's Word tells us who God is, and we *say the same thing*: Yes, I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God speaks, we listen, and we repeat it back to Him. And not just the answer itself, but *What does this mean?* It's important to know what we are confessing.

So Peter is in many ways a typical catechumen. He thought he knew. And he did, on one level. But he really didn't. And many catechumens today are the same. *I know this stuff, Pastor! You don't have to teach me!* But then ask them: *What does this mean?* . . . and, well, uh . . .

That's why we have catechesis. And why Jesus catechized His disciples that day on the way to Caesarea Philippi. They knew who He was. That's great. Step one. But *only* step one. They needed to know: *What does this mean? What does it mean that Jesus is the Christ?*

And this is what it means: ***that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.*** And Jesus ***said this plainly***, Mark tell us. No figures of speech. Nothing to interpret. Nothing uncertain. Just the facts. The Jewish leaders are going to kill Him. But He will rise from the dead.

Perhaps it was the directness that got Peter. The definiteness, the clarity. Because we sinful human beings tend to like *wiggle room*. We like when things are open to interpretation, even negotiation. I'm not wrong, just different. You do you. To each his own. But no wiggle room here with Jesus. So Peter takes Him aside . . . *Surely, it doesn't have to be that way, Jesus! Couldn't there be another way? Why so firm Jesus? Can't we talk about it?*

Because we *think* wiggle room is good. Options are good. Flexibility is good. *But the truth is exactly the opposite.* When things are definite, when you know for sure, you have security, you have confidence. This is right, this is wrong, this is good, this is bad. I know what to do, what to pursue. I know what not to do, what to avoid. But when things are unclear, squishy, open, then I don't know and can't be sure. There's doubt. And I know for me, and I suspect for you, too, even when I'm trying my best and think I'm doing the right thing, I often mess up and make wrong decisions! And if that's true with the things in my *life*, do I really want that with my *eternal* life? Uncertain, unsure, up to me?

So while ***Get behind me satan!*** sounds harsh, it is far better than the alternative, which is what satan said in the Garden: *Did God really say?* So here is Jesus being firm, taking charge, and **protecting Peter from himself**. Just as He would protect *and save* Peter with His sure and certain death on the cross. No wiggle room. This must be so it will be. Truth. Solid. Sure. Even if my sinful nature doesn't like it. I need it. To know the truth and what it means. To know Jesus came for this, *for me*. And will not change His mind.

That's what it means to be the Christ. He must suffer many things and be rejected and crucified **FOR YOU**. For the forgiveness of your sins. To forge a way through death to life in His resurrection. For *the wages of sin is death*. That's what you earned and He paid. And *the free gift of God is resurrection and eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23). That's what He earned and gave you in His love. *For God so loved the world . . .*

So ***you are the Christ***. Quite right, Peter! *Bravo! What does this mean?* That (pointing to the crucifix). And from that (crucifix), that (pointing to the Font). And from that (Font), that (pointing to the altar). For no cross, no Font, no Baptism, no dying and rising with Christ to a new life. And no cross, no altar, no Supper, no forgiveness and life-giving Body and Blood of Christ.

So yes, Peter, yes Christian, the Christ **MUST** suffer and die. That is the only way He can be the Christ, the Saviour of the world. The only way He can be MY Saviour. There is no other way to eternal life. No wiggle room here. Just the truth and what it means.

But Jesus' catechesis didn't end there. To confess that ***Jesus is the Christ*** means this, too: ***If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.*** And again notice: no wiggle room there. This is how it is. Not only will Jesus die on a cross. **There will be the cross in the life of a believer.**

Now, I can already hear the gears in your heads turning about this, trying to create some wiggle room! *What cross? When? How? Can I choose my cross? What if it's too heavy for me to bear? Can I switch? Surely, Jesus didn't mean I have to lose my life! He wants me to be happy, doesn't He? Doesn't He?*

Well, sure Jesus wants you to be happy. *But happy with what?* With the sin you think makes you happy, but is really hurting you and eating away at your life and relationships? Or a happiness that will last and is true, and instead of *eating away* at you, *gives* you life and enlarges your life?

So just as with Peter, while Jesus rebuking Peter and calling him satan *sounded* harsh but was actually **Jesus protecting Peter from himself**, so too here with the cross in your life. It sounds harsh. It sounds hard. And maybe it is. But it is **Jesus protecting you from yourself**. It is Jesus loving you. And there is no wiggle room with Him and His love. He loves you with a love that is sure, solid, unshakable, and absolute. And so in love, Jesus took up His cross to defeat sin, satan, death, and hell, and in love, He gives you the cross for the same reason. That satan and his lies not

take root in your hearts and lives. That the old sinner in you be crucified with Christ, that the new man, the Christian, live. You can hang onto your old, sinful ways and life if you want, but in the end you'll find out that what you thought was saving, what you thought was winning, was really losing. But if those old sinful ways and life are crucified with Christ, you may *think* you're losing - like it looked for Jesus on the cross! But you'll find that is really the way to victory and eternal life.

And it is the way to true happiness. Enjoy the things of this world and life, yes. They're good and created by God for us to enjoy. But even more than that, God wants you to live not just in this world, for a while, but with Him, forever. To become, as Peter wrote in his epistle that we heard today, ***a partaker of the divine nature***. The divine nature that in love became man to bear the cross for you, and that you, as ***a partaker of the divine nature***, in that same love, now bear for others. That you look at the challenges and difficulties in your life not as things to avoid and get away from, but times and places to bring Christ and His love. Times and places to pray, confess, and forgive. Times and places to learn and grow in the Word and in faith and in good works. For catechesis isn't just words. It is Jesus teaching us and forming us in our lives and deeds as well.

And notice how that change took place in Peter. From rebuker of Jesus in the Holy Gospel, to bold confessor in the first reading we heard, boldly proclaiming that ***there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved***. Good for you, Peter! No wiggle room! Definite. Absolute. Steadfast truth. And those who heard him ***were astonished . . . and recognized that they had been with Jesus***.

I pray the same be true for you. That because of your words and deeds, others recognize that you have been with Jesus. That others see Jesus in you. For to confess that ***Jesus is the Christ*** is to confess that the very Son of God has come to be with us in the mess we make of this world and our lives. That no how messy your life gets, or your family gets, or this world gets, or even our church gets, God in the flesh is here with us. Really and truly. He is here with forgiveness and life, here with His Body and Blood, *for you*. You are not alone and don't have to go it alone.

But along with that, like Peter, you bring *the Jesus who is with you* to others. Bringing His love and forgiveness and life into a messy and messed up world. And boldly sure about it! Confessing a truth that is not squishy and unsure, but certain and absolute. As certain and absolute as Jesus' empty tomb. No wiggle room. Just the truth. So that while today, just as in Jesus' day, that may not be popular, and there are people all around us saying all kinds of things about Jesus and His teaching, about what is truth and the way to eternal life, we confess with Peter not only with our mouths and words, but with our deeds of love and forgiveness: ***You are the Christ***. And both

know in our hearts and show in our lives exactly *what that means*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.