When I was a youngster it was the custom for the Archbishop to come to our small northeast Kansas town every seven years … to confirm all the second through eighth-graders. So it happened that sixty-five years ago … when I was in the second grade … I was confirmed. And of course … we were expected to take a new name … a saint’s name. I was seven and clueless … and I am very sure the saint’s name I selected was because the name sounded cool or … there was a neat statue of said saint in the church or … because I had heard a story about that saint that captured my imagination or … any other reason that a seven year old might have.

Now … during my twelve years as Faith Formation Director here … I have assisted at many Confirmations … mostly of adults … who also chose new saints names. And I couldn’t help pondering the difference … between how the childish seven year old Steve and these very purposeful adults set about selecting their confirmation names. All of them picked names of saints that had special meaning for their lives … some because of their occupations … others because of their heritage … some, of course, for other reasons but all very deliberately … very painstakingly. Some of them really seemed to agonize over the choice but all of them … picked saints that they could really identify with … for one reason or another. And they could do this because they really knew themselves … as … of course … a seven year old cannot.

Well … Now … I have lived long enough … and know myself well enough … and if I had it to do over again … which of course, I don’t … but if I did … I would most certainly select the saint featured so prominently in our first reading and in the Gospel today. You see … like Peter … I am one of those people who makes lots of wrong turns … lots of bad decisions … talks when he should listen. I frequently don’t know when to shut up and often rush in where angels fear to tread. I am also one of those who sometimes declares to God his fidelity … promising not to do this or that ever again … then goes right out and demonstrates some all too human weakness … or gets twenty feet away from the boat before he figures out he … CAN’T … walk on water! I am sure I try the patience of my God … just like our first Pope … possibly the most … transparently … human of all the saints.

And it is precisely that humanity … that frailty … that blundering … those very human failures … that endears Peter to me … because I think that Peter personifies and exemplifies the very notion of Easter … of resurrection … of redemption.
Not long before the events of today’s Gospel … Peter had stood in Pilot’s courtyard warming himself by a charcoal fire … not unlike the fire on which Jesus was cooking their breakfast. Three times … as his Lord had foretold … he had denied that he knew Jesus … then the cock had crowed. He remembered and … he wept. Then … he could have gone from there down the road to despair. Scripture certainly indicates Judas did when he realized the impact of his betrayal. … But that’s not the road Peter chose. He did not despair. For all his sorrow … because of his denial … Peter still had faith that all was not lost. He still had hope! Oh he certainly did not by any means … at this point … understand all that Jesus had said … but on some level … the message of God’s love, forgiveness and mercy had gotten through to him!

Upon hearing the stone had been removed Peter ran to the tomb. Upon hearing that the person speaking to them from the shore was the Lord, Peter jumped into the sea. Something of what Jesus had been telling his disciples had gotten through to Peter. He still sought reconciliation with his Lord! … He still sought his Lord’s Love!

And after this fisherman … who was to become a fisher of men and was to bring his harvest … his catch … to the Lord’s table … after he brought this catch of fish to the Lord’s breakfast … and after he and the others had been nourished … he finally found verbal assurance of the Lord’s love and forgiveness.

As he sat there with Jesus around that charcoal fire and heard his Lord ask him if he loved Him not once but three times … his mind must have gone back to that earlier charcoal fire and his threefold denial and … his remorse … once more … must have been agony! And then … to hear his Lord’s stated trust and implied forgiveness with the simple statements: “Feed my lambs.” … “Tend my sheep.” … “Feed my sheep.” … and finally … simply … “Follow me.”

I can, of course … only speak for myself … but when I take stock of all my imperfections and failings … and tend to think things like … “I am sure a mess! or “How could God possibly love a backslider like me?” And then I look at our first Pope. I look at his resurrection … his salvation from despair … his redemption. I hear stories of courage like the one we heard in our first reading today … about Peter’s courageous witness before the Sanhedrin … and I realize the profound truth that salvation … Jesus’ sacred gift of our redemption … is not a gift meant for the perfect … not for the flawless … but for exasperating … flawed … very imperfect … human beings … sinners … just like me … and maybe … even like you!