

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 ... **sinner**s ... just like me ... and **maybe** ... even like you!