

Maundy Thursday Reflection on John 18:19-27

The reading today is the familiar one where Peter finds himself in a very difficult situation indeed. When the other disciples deserted Jesus and fled, Peter followed Jesus, even after his arrest, because he couldn't bear to tear himself away. So he came to the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, and there in the courtyard he denied knowing Jesus three times. At cockcrow he suddenly had the terrible realisation that he had done exactly what Jesus had predicted.

I feel very sorry for Peter because down the years commentators and preachers have stressed his failure and shame. But remember that the other disciples had fled, so think what Peter had done. He alone in the garden drew his sword against fearful odds and he alone followed right to the end. Don't remember his failure, but the courage which kept him close to Jesus when everyone else had run away. True he failed, but he failed in a situation which none of the other disciples dared to face. He failed, not because he was a coward, but because he was very brave.

We must also remember how much Peter loved Jesus. The others abandoned Jesus, but Peter alone stood by him. He loved Jesus so much that he could not leave him. True he failed, but he failed in circumstances which only a faithful lover of Jesus would ever have encountered.

We must remember too how Peter redeemed himself. Things could not have been easy for him. The story of his denial would soon get about, for people love a malicious tale. But Peter had the courage and the tenacity of purpose to redeem himself, to start from failure and attain greatness.

The heart of the matter was that it was the real Peter who declared his loyalty in the upper room; it was the real Peter who drew his lonely sword in the moonlit garden; it was the real Peter who followed Jesus, because he could not let his Lord go alone.

It was not the real Peter who cracked beneath the tension and denied his Lord. And that is just what Jesus could see. The tremendous thing about Jesus is that beneath all our failures he sees the real person. He understands. He loves us in spite of what we do because he loves us, not for what we are, but for what we have in us to be.

Peter

Dear Lord

We thank you for the wonderful forgiving love of Jesus which is so great because he sees our real personality, not in our faithfulness, but in our loyalty, and not in our defeat by sin, but in our reaching after goodness, even when we are defeated.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen



The Denial of St Peter by Caravaggio 1610