

THE ROCK OF FAITH

In my meditative message to all of you on Christmas Day, I wrote about the fragility of Faith, that it cannot be bestowed or granted but, we had to work extremely hard in search for this spiritual anchor. And once this anchor is broken and cast away, the ship would be adrift and ravaged by stormy seas; but, we would recover and sail to a safe haven because of **the** unbroken **Promise** from HIM.

This **flash of insight** came about after a rather long period of meditation. It was unusual. On further reflection, I hold firm to the view that it was the understanding of an incredible story that occupied the deepest recesses of my subconscious mind until Christmas morning.

It is a story of a simple man, a fisherman who was singled out to occupy a special place reserved by HIM. He was the **first of the four**, and followed by eight others much later.

Mark (1:16-20) describes it well:

*“And as HE walked by the Seas of Galilee, HE saw **Simon** and **Andrew** his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Follow ME and I will make you become fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed HIM.*

*“When HE had gone a little further from there, HE saw **James** the son of Zebedee, and **John** his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. And HE immediately called them, and they left their father Zebedee on the boat with the hired servants, and went after HIM.”*

Jesus named Simon, **Peter**.

The Apostles, headed by Simon Peter was with Jesus from the beginning. They were the twelve witnesses to all that were revealed and they were sent out to spread Jesus' teachings. But, there were lingering doubts. One day, Jesus asked his disciples, **who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?** They said, **some say John the**

Baptist, some Elijah and others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Jesus then turned to them and asked, *but, who do you say that I am?*

Simon Peter answered,

“You are Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Jesus said to Simon Peter,

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew (16:13-19)

It was this act of faith by Simon Peter that Jesus responded by granting the special conferment to Simon Peter and to him alone!

Just pause and ponder on this heavy responsibility and awesome duty. And Simon Peter was a mere fisherman.

I want all of you reading the above passage to imagine that YOU are in the shoes of Simon Peter the first Apostle – feel his joy, ecstasy, pride of being singled out and the humility for being so conferred. Most of us would be in cloud nine!

Then the horror!

Mark tells us (14:27-31) just before Jesus was handed over to the Chief Priests and Scribes:

Then Jesus said to them,

“All of you will be made to stumble because of ME this night,” for it is written:

‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’

“But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.”

Peter said to HIM, *“Even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not be.”*

Jesus said to him, *“Assuredly, I say to you that today, even this night before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”*

But, he spoke more vehemently, *“if I have to die with YOU, I will not deny YOU!”*

“And they all said likewise.”

But, Simon Peter did deny Jesus thrice!

So, what is the point that I am getting at?

As Matthew narrated, Simon Peter who was the ‘rock of faith’ and was given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, was tested in the most humiliating way, and was so frightened and unprepared that he denied Jesus who he had proudly declared to be ‘Christ, the Son of the Living God.’ And on the realisation that he had denied Jesus as foretold, he ran in utter shame and cried his eyes out! So, not only did Simon Peter stumbled he fell into the depths of despair, pain and anguish beyond our imagination!

The faith that gave him the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven deserted him in a manner beyond comprehension. Yet, after the crucifixion, and on the third day, Jesus resurrected, fulfilling his Promise, restored the faith to Simon Peter and his apostles!

This was the essence of my Christmas Message - the flash of my meditative insight, emerging from the deepest recesses of my subconscious mind.

Simon Peter stumbled, lost his faith and denied of all people, Jesus!

So, how strong is our faith? How has it been tested?

Faith is so fragile then when we lose it, we will not have the resurrected Christ to make us whole again as was the case of

Simon Peter and the apostles. What we are left with is the evidence of the fulfilment of all *the Promises made* by Jesus.

Would this be sufficient? I do not have the answer because we are all different.

But, there is this consolation which will strengthen our resolve.

Simon Peter died by being nailed to a cross in Rome as was Jesus. According to the apocryphal Acts of Peter, Peter asked to be crucified upside down, as he felt unworthy to die as Jesus did. As a fisherman, he denied Jesus thrice, but when FAITH was restored, he died a gruesome death without denying Jesus. He was incredibly steadfast in his Faith in Jesus.

Can we be like Simon Peter?

I hope you would agree that faith is not bestowed or granted. We have to work hard at it, strengthen it and not be complacent about it until our last breath. The story of Simon Peter the fisherman is a grim reminder that it is insufficient to declare, "I am a Christian", "I believe in Jesus", "I am born again" etc.

Count every blessing and the answered prayers, as well as the unanswered prayers for HE works in mysterious ways. But, count we must, for there is no other way.

However, if you have another way, please do share with me.