

“Even if I must die with You, I will not deny You!” (Matthew 26:35). That is what he said. Peter loved his Lord. He could not imagine the affection he felt for Jesus ever being insufficient. But the Lord knows what is in humanity, and in fallen humanity there is fear—fear of death above all. Fear of death, as the letter to the Hebrews (2:15) puts it, is how the devil keeps us in bondage. So the Lord tells Peter before it ever happens that it will happen. Not once, not twice, but three times, Peter will be given opportunity to confess his Lord. Not once, not twice, but three times, Peter will instead deny him. Among the wounds that afflicted our Lord during his Passion, surely the denial of his beloved disciple Peter looms large.

Who among us has not added to that wound? Opportunities to confess our Savior come along all the time, yet how often do we pass them by in silence? Our silence denies him. Isn't our fear the same? Now it's probably not the fear of physical death as much as it is the fear of the death of others' respect, the fear of the death of their friendship (who wants to befriend a religious fanatic), the fear of the death of our reputation (what will others say about us if we are known for talking about Jesus?) and so... the silence, which is denial, just as surely as saying, “I do not know the man.”

Come marvel with me at Jesus. See His Sacred Head and Body wounded—mortally wounded—all because He will not deny you or me. Our denials of him need not result in his denial of us. For he has carried them to death, and where we denied, he made the good confession before the high priest and before Pontius Pilate. Jesus did not let fear of death deter him, and you and I do well to ponder that. For though our Lord hates death, he does not fear it. He came into this world to destroy it. He came so that his people would be set free from their fear.

Standing before the high priest, Jesus knows what is about to happen. He knows that he will yield his life upon the cross, his blood blotting out the guilt of our sin. Jesus also knows that his Father will never abandon him in the grave. The way several early Christian preachers put it, Jesus was death's poison pill. Having swallowed him down—the indigestible son of God—death

began to gag and gave back all it had swallowed. Jesus does not fear death, because death will never be the end of him or of anyone who is joined to him. Now, Peter has only heard that Jesus will be raised from the dead, but he sees his Master in the hands of those who are beating him and who will turn him over to be crucified. Peter's courage dissolves, and rather than confess his connection to Jesus, in fear of death, Peter denies him. As the fateful rooster crows, he recalls how his Lord said it would be so, and Peter goes out and weeps bitterly. Peter wept bitter tears for his own fear and sin and cowardice, but, somehow, he did not despair. This is precisely where Peter differs from Judas. How Peter was able to hang on where Judas gave up is something we can only guess about; but we do know that Jesus had said, "Tonight you will all stumble in your faith on account of me...but after I rise from the dead, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." For all Peter's colossal failure, he was holding on to some hope—could it be that there was still a way that Jesus could make things right?

Because—think of the Peter we meet on the other side of the resurrection, on the day of Pentecost. The Peter who cowered before the servant girl and her friends boldly tells the crowds that day: "This Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree, God has raised from the dead, and we are all his witnesses!" (see Acts 5:30–32). What stands between the frightened fisherman warming himself by the fire and the passionate preacher in the temple? The resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit blasted Peter into a whole new trajectory.

And if you can wrap your mind around it, the resurrection of Jesus and the Holy Spirit have broken into your life and moved everything around. There in baptismal waters you were placed into the tomb with Jesus and raised with him! Never-ending life with God began at that moment. In baptismal waters, the Holy Spirit descended on you like he descended on Peter and the other apostles on Pentecost, transforming them into bold confessors. What changed was the conviction of faith that Jesus truly has destroyed death's power, and when you make that the bedrock foundation of your life, it changes everything.

A Christian man and his wife lost their young son in a tragic accident on Good Friday in 1996. The boy's funeral was on Easter Sunday. During the memorial service the father got up and shared with his family and friends that Easter had taken on a new importance. "Until you stare death eye-to-eye," he said, through heavy tears, "Easter is just a word. It's a nice day with bunny rabbits and eggs . . . but when someone so precious to you dies, Easter

becomes **everything** . . . an anchor in a fierce storm . . . a rock on which to stand . . . a hope that raises you above despair and keeps you going." Those whom God has adopted and gifted with faith also have the promise that they live in Jesus forever, and the separation that death causes now is temporary, not final.

Faith in the risen Savior offers you that very same confidence, so you can say:

My Savior, be Thou near me When death is at my door;
Then let Thy presence cheer me, Forsake me nevermore!
When soul and body languish, O leave me not alone,
But take away mine anguish By virtue of Thine own! (LSB 450:6)