

## St. Peter and the Three Stages of the Spiritual Life

### The Three Stages of the Spiritual Life

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### The Spiritual Life of St. Peter

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### St. Peter and the Three Stages of the Spiritual Life

1. Reginald Garrigou Lagrange. *The Three Conversions of the Spiritual Life*. TAN Books, 2002.
2. St. Catherine of Siena. *The Dialogue*. TAN Books, 2010.

## 1. The Purgative Way (Spiritual Childhood)

### Simon First Encounters Jesus

One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). *He brought him to Jesus*. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). (John 1:40-42)

### The Repentance and Call of Simon

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennes'aret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "*Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.*" And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.* (Luke 5:1-11)

### The Spiritual Misunderstanding of Peter

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. *And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you."* But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men." Then Jesus told his disciples, "*If any man would*

*come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:21-25)*

### **The Spiritual Consolations of Peter**

[Jesus] took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Eli'jah... *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah" -- not knowing what he said... (Luke 9:28-36)*

### **The Spiritual Pride of Peter**

And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." *Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not."* And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, *"If I must die with you, I will not deny you."* And they all said the same. (Mark 14:26-31)

### **The Spiritual Weakness of Peter**

And they went to a place which was called Gethsem'ane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him... *And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak..."* "And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Mark 14:32-42)

### **The Spiritual Failure of Peter**

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them... And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, *"Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"* And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him... Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. *Peter followed at a distance; and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.* Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later some one else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are

saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.* (Luke 22:47-62)

## 2. The Illuminative Way (Spiritual Adolescence)

### The Second Conversion of Peter

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you (Gk "you all") that he might sift you like wheat, *but I have prayed for you* (Gk "you" singular) *that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.*" (Luke 22:31-32)

### The Threefold Restoration of Peter

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe'ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan'a-el of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (Gk *agapao*) more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you (Gk *phileo*)." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (*agapao*)?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you (*phileo*)." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (*phileo*)?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me (*phileo*)?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you (*phileo*)." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:1-17)

### Peter between the Resurrection and Ascension

To them [the apostles Jesus] presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, *appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God... And when he had said this, as*

*they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight... Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet... they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew... All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:3, 6-14)*

### **3. The Unitive Way (Spiritual Adulthood)**

#### **Pentecost and the Spiritual Fatherhood of Peter**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh... And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'... Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him..." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:14-42)*

#### **The Spiritual Wonders of Peter**

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But *Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. (Acts 3:1-8)*

#### **The Spiritual Courage of Peter**

*Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem... and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known*

*to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:1-13)*

### **The Spiritual Zeal of Peter**

And when they had brought them [the apostles], they set them before the Sanhedrin. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "*We must obey God rather than men.* The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him..." [W]hen they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.* And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 12:1-40-42)

### **The Suffering of Peter**

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword; and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. *This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.* And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, *intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.* So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. (Acts 12:1-5)

### **Peter's Final Act of Love**

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (Gk *agapao*) more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you (Gk *phileo*)..." "

[Jesus said to Peter] "*Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.*" This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.

Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me! (Gk *su moi akolouthei*)." (John 21:15-16, 18-22)

### **The Martyrdom of Peter**

Simon Peter the son of John, from the village of Bethsaida in the province of Galilee, brother of Andrew the apostle, and himself chief of the apostles, after having been bishop of the church of

Antioch and having preached to the Dispersion — the believers in circumcision, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia— pushed on to Rome in the second year of Claudius to overthrow Simon Magus, and held the sacerdotal chair there for twenty-five years until the last, that is the fourteenth, year of Nero. *At his hands he received the crown of martyrdom being nailed to the cross with his head towards the ground and his feet raised on high, asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.* (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 1)