

And then the rooster crowed. Like the sound of a thousand bells tolling for my judgment, the rooster crowed ... and wakened me. And I ... remembered. A flood of tears came washing across my face as I bent to the earth in shame. I had failed my Lord! No, more than that: I had denied him! Sobbing through my tears, I rose to run away, and when I lifted my head just enough to see the way ... what I saw instead ... was HIM ... there on the porch ... and he saw me! No, more than saw—he looked at me, intently and on purpose.

Oh, if only I could describe what I saw in his look. Not the anger or disgust I had expected there, that I deserved. No, I will tell you how I remember it. In that glance, I saw him reaching out to me, to save me once again. In the midst of his great agony, he had remembered me!

“Do this for the remembrance of me,” he said, the very night in which he was denied, betrayed. “When you do this, remember me.” I do. My eyes once overflowed with tears; now it is my cup that overflows. I should have been there when he died, but failed him then. He prayed for me, and saved me from the fiercest storm of all. I should have been there when he died, but now I will deny him no longer. I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will show forth his death until he comes.

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Homily: Palm Sunday

Look at your hands. Upon each finger a whirling, swirling pattern—each individual, different, unique. No two people’s hands are exactly alike—differing in size, color, strength, elegance. The calloused hands of the farmer, the steady hands of the surgeon, the slender fingers of the concert pianist, the strong hands of the carpenter.

Look at your hands. What do they say about you—your occupation, your history? Is there, perhaps, a scar—a tiny reminder of a sports injury or a childhood accident? Perhaps a small callus on your middle finger that reminds you of the awkward way you handle a pencil? Maybe there’s a burn mark, reminding you of the time that you shoveled that loaf of bread into the oven too quickly. Or the faint reminder of where you formerly wore a ring.

If Peter, the fish-catching, sword-wielding, fast-talking disciple of Jesus were to look at his hands, what do you suppose he might find?

Calluses, almost certainly. Years of trimming the nets, hauling in catches and handling the oars would have undoubtedly left their mark.

But what else?

This night, the night of the Passover, the night of remembrance, Peter’s hands may have still carried the aroma of roasted lamb and bitter herb, of fresh-baked bread and fresh-poured wine.

But, almost certainly, his hands would be wet with tears—his big, hairy face, buried in those rough, fisherman’s hands as he wept. When the rooster crowed, and when, with it, the memory of Jesus’ warning came flooding back to him, Peter was overcome with grief, and wept bitterly. Peter had forgotten the warning. Worse yet, he had turned his back upon his Lord.

Look at your hands. Do you see in them the residue of tears, long since dried up? Do you see in your hands the bitter memories of times when your back was turned to the presence of Christ in your life? When, perhaps, the storms of life raged with such fury that you might have lost sight of Jesus' calming, steadying power?

Christ's eyes met Peter's, that night so long ago, and reminded him—of the warning, of the denial.

But they reminded Peter (and us as well) of something far more important. Even when we do not remember, even when denial is on our lips, Jesus Christ will never forget us. Our God remembers. That may be the very best news of all.

Monologue: Peter

I should have been there when he died. I had promised him I would. "If everyone forsakes you, I will never fall away," I said. "I am ready to go with you to prison and to death. I will lay down my life for you." Instead, he laid down his life for me. He is the one who remained faithful to his promises.

You know me as Peter, "The Rock," but I was a rock that turned to sand; I was sifted like wheat by Satan, because of my own arrogance and pride, my brash self-confidence. That was then. But now my heart is torn with guilt and shame. Though others nailed him to the cross by what they did, in a way I crucified him too, by what I did not do.

Here, alone in the darkness, I am beginning to see what I should have seen before, what he warned me about: my pompous, self-centered belief in myself. The day he walked by ... there I was with my brother Andrew, and he said, "Come, follow me!" Of course I followed him; there was nothing that could have kept me from following. "I will make you fish for people," he said.

Was that why he chose me? What did he see in a large, loud fisherman? Did he need me to stand by him with my strength? To shield him? To be close enough that he could share his most sensitive moments with me?

Perhaps I was chosen to lead. I could do that ... and did it. I would stand out and be noticed by the rest of them. Remember that night on the Sea of Galilee? That terrible storm? We all thought we were going to drown. Then, in the midst of the waves—there on the water ... Who? ... What? ... Is it a ghost? — "It is I," I heard him say. And before anyone else could even think, I cried out, "If it is you, let me come out to you ... on the water." What moved me to say a crazy thing like that? Was it my closeness to him? Or did I want them to see my strength, my powerful faith? What happened

that night should have taught me, once and for all. I was out on that water, actually walking—fearless me!—and then that wave. I cried out, "Save me, Lord!" ... and sank ... like a rock. There is something else I should have learned from that experience, something I should never have forgotten—that he would never turn his back on me. He would never abandon me; he would never deny me; he would never act as though he did not know me.... Even as I was sinking, he reached down and saved me.

"Who do you say I am?" he asked on another occasion. Once again, it was I who "led with my mouth," rushing to speak before all the others: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!"—"And you are Peter," he replied. "On this rock I will build my church."—On me? Was that the answer? Was that the reason that he needed me?—No, not on me: "Peter, Peter, you will become as sand," he seemed to say. "Satan desires to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you." Prayed for me? What did he see that I did not?

"Remember me," he said—this very night he said it, as we shared the Passover meal. "Remember me," he said—as if we could forget! "This bread—my body broken for you. Do this for the remembrance of me. This cup—new covenant in my own blood, forgiveness for all. Do this for the remembrance of me." As if we could forget! "All of you will forsake me," he said. "No, not I, Lord! Never!" How could he say that of me? Of them, yes, possibly. But I ... I had always been by his side, bold, eager, brash and ready ... ready even to die. "Yes, all of you," he said. And then he spoke to me: "Before the rooster crows a second time tonight, three times you will have denied me."

I would not! I would stand beside him! There in the garden, I would show him. They came with lamps and swords; they reached for him to take him. I would not forsake him! My sword glistened in the torchlight. A cry, blood. "Peter, stop! Put up your sword!" But I was trying to protect him! They seized him then, and we all scattered. But I would yet prove my loyalty. I would not forsake him.

They took him to the house of Caiaphas, where a trial would take place. What should I do? I wanted to be with him, to stand by him, to testify for him ... to do something. Someone needed to be there. Instead, I waited, hiding in the darkness.

Shall I fill in the details? You already know. They couldn't leave me alone; one after another, they remembered me ... or said they did ... or questioned me. Each time—three times—"You are surely one of them." Why did I deny? Not only deny, but finally curse his name—that was the old fisherman in me, spouting those damning epithets. That I remembered how to do. Bravery? Strength? Trustworthiness? Those I seem to have forgotten. Once again Peter-the-Rock was sinking.