

# PETER

CORNERSTONE OF CATHOLICISM  
STUDY GUIDE

**SAMPLE**



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil obstat: Derek Barr, Censor Deputatus

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PETER: CORNERSTONE OF CATHOLICISM

<b>Session 1: Put Out Into the Deep:</b> The Making of an Apostle.....	1
<b>Session 2: Capernaum:</b> Village of Coming Consolation.....	21
<b>Session 3: Faith Not Fear:</b> Walking in Trust.....	41
<b>Session 4: Peter the Rock:</b> The Primacy of Jesus.....	63
<b>Session 5: Peter and the Keys:</b> The Primacy of the Church.....	85
<b>Session 6: In the Shadow of the Galilean:</b> Peter’s Rising Leadership.....	107
<b>Session 7: Discipleship at a Distance:</b> Peter and the Passion of Christ.....	127
<b>Session 8: Peter and Pentecost:</b> The Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit.....	149
<b>Session 9: Peter bar Jonah:</b> How Peter Came to Rome.....	169
<b>Session 10: “Quo Vadis?”:</b> Peter’s Way of the Cross.....	187

## LECTIO

Welcome to the *LECTIO* Study Series. In these ten sessions of *LECTIO*, you will discover the profound importance, meaning, purpose, and beauty of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, as seen through the eyes of the Church.

*LECTIO* studies are designed for adult faith formation, to help unveil both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Latin word *lectio* means “reading” and often refers to a careful and prayerful reading of Scripture. These studies cover a wide variety of topics, including individual books or letters of the Bible, the lives and writings of the saints, Church teaching, and topics to help serve the formation of Catholics living out the call of the New Evangelization. This Study Guide, Leader Resource Guide, and Session Videos are the three components that are used for each *LECTIO* session. These three work together to enable a small group to receive the truth of the Catholic faith and apply it to their everyday lives.

## A LECTIO SESSION

This Study Guide takes you step-by-step through each session, both the small group gathering and video teaching, as well as five days of follow-up study. The resources are carefully crafted to lead you through an opening of your heart and mind to God’s Word and the Traditions of the Catholic Church.

### WHAT YOU’LL FIND IN EACH LECTIO SESSION:

#### CONNECT

1. **Opening Prayer:** We have chosen Scripture from the first and second Letters of Peter as a way to “pray with Peter” throughout this study.
2. **Introduction:** We start with a brief overview of the topic, including the key points for the session. This helps contextualize the topic, show its relevance for daily life, and inspire you to delve into the particular aspect of the faith that is being presented.
3. **Ice-Breaker Questions:** You’ll review the verse and daily reflections from the previous session, and then share your thoughts on questions related to the new session.

#### VIDEO

4. **Video Teaching:** The video segment teaches the topic by diving deeply into Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church. The video teachings are presented by Dr. Tim Gray of the Augustine Institute. A brief outline of each teaching is included in the Study Guide.

#### DISCUSS

5. **Memory Verse:** The Psalms encourage us to treasure God’s Word in our heart through memorization saying, “I have laid up thy word in my heart...” (Psalm 119:11). You are encouraged to memorize and reflect on a Scripture verse for every session so as to nurture the faith that has been deepened through your study.
6. **Closing Prayer:** The Closing Prayer in your Study Guide has been chosen to reflect back to God an appropriate response to his loving action in the session.
7. **For Further Reading:** For supplemental study, you are encouraged to refer to the additional reading resources.
8. **Quotes, Tips, and Definitions:** We have included throughout the study interesting quotes and excerpts from saints, Catholic documents, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, or Catholic authors to help further understand a particular topic

#### COMMIT

The Study Guide includes five daily reflections that will help you more deeply explore the main topics of each session and more firmly commit to following Christ in your daily life. These reflections include more information on Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, as well as topics such as geography, history, and art. Some of these reflections will also include times of prayer, including the practice of Scripture meditation known as *Lectio Divina*.

To learn more about *Lectio Divina*, check out Dr. Tim Gray’s book *Praying Scripture for a Change*, available at [AscensionPress.com](http://AscensionPress.com).

# SESSION 1

## PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP: THE MAKING OF AN APOSTLE

### WELCOME TO OUR OPENING SESSION

Over the course of this study, we'll explore the life of Peter—with quite a few surprises along the way—and how he went from being a fisherman to becoming one of the most remarkable characters in the New Testament, and all of history. But first, let's open in prayer from the First Letter of Peter.



### OPENING PRAYER

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

—1 Peter 1:3-5

God our Father, we give you thanks and praise for the new life we have in you by our baptism, and the work that you are doing in each of our lives to transform us to the image of your Son. May we persevere in a joyful longing for the glorious inheritance you have in store for us. Teach us to follow you closely through the intercession and example of St. Peter. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. Peter, pray for us.

### INTRODUCTION

*“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”* —Ephesians 4:19-22

While Jesus alone is the cornerstone of the Church, he calls each of his disciples to be the living stones by which his house is built (see 1 Peter 2:5). Among these stones, Peter, the head of the Apostles, has a key role to play. Jesus declares that it is upon the rock of Peter that he will build his Church (see Matthew 16:18). Thus Peter takes his place alongside Jesus, the living stone that was rejected by men (1 Peter 2:4), as a model for all Christ's disciples.

*Saint Peter* Copyright of the image Museo Nacional del Prado / Art Resource, NY



This study on St. Peter is subtitled “Cornerstone of Catholicism,” and Peter is a vital and fundamental stone, but the more we study and understand the life of Peter, the better we will know the one Peter followed and professed, the true and absolute Cornerstone of the Church, Jesus Christ.

In June 2014, on the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Pope Francis exhorted his newly appointed archbishops to follow the faithful example of St. Peter, Rome’s first Bishop. “Peter shows us the way... Our true refuge is trust in God.”

The story of St. Peter begins with an ordinary act of trust, which would entirely change the ordinary course of Peter’s life. Along the shore of Galilee, Peter’s brother Andrew introduced him to a traveling rabbi named Jesus of Nazareth. By deciding to follow Jesus, an unknown fisherman would discover his call to become a fisher of men and become a key player in the story of salvation history.



## CONNECT

1. Introduce yourself to the group, and share one or two things that most interest you about St. Peter.
2. What profession, hobby, or activity are you involved in? How did you learn it?
3. Think of a time you trusted someone and the result was very good. How did that experience affect your relationship with that person?







# DISCUSS

1. What are some of the reasons Dr. Gray gives for calling Peter a “model disciple”? How does God use Peter’s strengths—including trust—to build the Church? How does Peter persevere in spite of his weaknesses?

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2. Peter, a devout Jew, grows up in the village of Bethsaida, in the midst of a very Gentile and Hellenistic culture. How did this prepare Peter for his future mission? How does God “equip the called”?

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3. What is one of the earmarks of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, according to Peter in Acts 1:21? As modern disciples of Jesus Christ, how do we live this out today?

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4. When Jesus called Peter to “put out into the deep,” he was calling Peter to trust him. Why is trust an important aspect in our lives of faith?

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5. What is one example from Peter’s life that encourages you to become a more faithful disciple of Jesus?

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6. Peter spent much time with Jesus, walking the hills of Galilee. Do you spend time with Jesus in prayer, worship, and adoration? What can you do to make time to incorporate or deepen these practices in your daily life?

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## MEMORY VERSE

*“Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”*

—Luke 5:4



### CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord, in the midst of Peter’s life as a simple fisherman, you called him to play a role in a story much bigger than his own. In Peter, you called an ordinary man to become an extraordinary disciple. When you called Peter saying, “Follow me,” Peter responded with his whole life, and that meant persevering in the midst of failures, weaknesses, and trials. Lord Jesus Christ, help us to grow in our trust in you as Peter did; to step out in faith, putting out into the deep. Help us always to be your faithful disciples, leaving behind those things that distract us from you, following you no matter where you lead. Amen.

St. Peter, pray for us.

### FOR FURTHER READING

*Catechism of the Catholic Church 222*

Also see CCC 227, “Believing in God, the only One, and loving him with all our being has enormous consequences for our whole life.”

Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory* (Baker Academic, 2012)



# COMMIT – DAY 1

## THE SEA OF GALILEE

If we are going to study and learn about the life of St. Peter, it will be helpful to begin with a brief understanding of the area in which he lived and, in particular, the sea which he likely looked upon nearly every day of his early life and from which he drew his livelihood (along with several other apostles).



Peter grew up and lived along the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, which is located approximately 40 miles inland from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, in the northern third of the modern state of Israel. While the Sea of Galilee is fed by underground springs, its primary source is the Jordan River, which rises on the slopes of Mt. Hermon near the Syrian-Lebanese border and flows southward through northern Israel into the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This body of water is the largest freshwater lake in the Holy Land (measuring 8 miles at its widest point and more than 12 miles long from north to south) and the lowest freshwater lake on the earth (sitting approximately 700 feet below sea level).

The lake goes by various names. Look up the following verses in the Bible. What names are given for this lake in the heart of Galilee?

John 6:1 \_\_\_\_\_

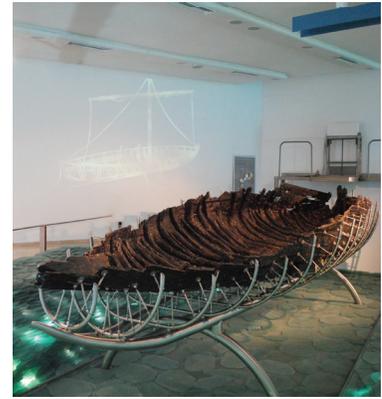
Numbers 34:11 \_\_\_\_\_

Luke 5:1 \_\_\_\_\_



The name Sea of Galilee is taken from the name of the region in which the lake is located, the region of Galilee. The name Sea of Tiberias is taken from the name of the largest city on the shore of the sea, the city of Tiberias. And the names Sea of Chinnereth or Gennesaret are taken from the Hebrew word for “harp” or “lyre,” given the lake’s shape.

Today the areas around this large body of water appear almost deserted, but in the time of Jesus and Peter, the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in particular was a bustling and densely populated district, alive with the daily activities of a string of fishing towns and villages. Some of the towns and villages along the Sea of Galilee in the first century included Capernaum and Bethsaida on the north, Magdala and Tiberius on the west, and a Greek city of the Decapolis to the east. The Via Maris (the Way of the Sea), the well-traveled highway connecting Damascus, Syria, to the busy port of Caesarea Maritima on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and from there to Egypt, followed the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee from Capernaum to Magdala. This highway kept a constant stream of merchants, traders, and travelers passing by these towns.



First century fishing boat, photo © Augustine Institute



Tilapia / © HPhoto/Shutterstock.com

The Sea of Galilee was teeming with fish, and even today fishermen still catch tilapia fish, also called *musht* or St. Peter's fish, on its waters. Josephus records in *The Wars of the Jews* that the waters of the Sea of Galilee were "sweet, and very agreeable for drinking" and that there were "several kinds of fish in it, different both to the taste and the sight from those elsewhere." The town of Magdala was the location of a large fish-processing center, and fish caught on the lake could easily be brought to Magdala, processed, and then sent down the Via Maris to be shipped off to locations all over the Roman Empire. In fact, first-century writers note that Judea, and Magdala in particular, was known for its variety of processed fish. The fishing trade on the Sea of Galilee not only required processing of fish once caught (accomplished in various ways, such as curing, salting, pickling, etc.), but it would also have required the services of other local craftsmen providing such items as stone anchors, fishing nets and baskets, and wood for building and repairing boats. Thus, as fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, and John were at the heart of a dynamic economy, the fruits of which spread far and wide.

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**JOSEPHUS:** Titus Flavius Josephus was a first-century Jewish historian, commonly referred to simply as Josephus. He initially fought against the Romans in the first Jewish-Roman War (AD 66–73), but after surrendering he became a friend and advisor to Titus during the siege of Jerusalem. Josephus wrote several works, the most important of which are *The Wars of the Jews* and *The Antiquities of the Jews*.

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Mt. Arbell – Sea of Galilee, photo © Augustine Institute



Golan Heights – Sea of Galilee, photo © Augustine Institute



*Northwest shore, Sea of Galilee, photo © Aprilphoto/Shutterstock.com*

The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by a variety of mountain cliffs, hills, and intermittent fertile plains. On its eastern side, leaving little to no shoreline, the southern mountains of the Golan Heights stand with their stark, steep, sandstone cliffs reaching some 2,000 feet to the sky. Just west of Magdala, set back from the shore, the distinctive cliff face of Mt. Arbel sits across from Mt. Nitai, with a rugged gorge running between them, through which passes the Via Maris. The sea's location nestled below these mountains makes it subject to sudden and violent storms as the wind comes either through the gorge or over the heights and drops onto the sea. Such a change in wind can produce frightening conditions and sudden storms, as we read in Matthew 8:23-26.

But between these heights surrounding the sea are also fertile hills and valleys. Josephus describes Galilee saying, "Their soil is universally rich and fruitful, and full of the plantations of trees of all sorts, insomuch that it invites the most slothful to take pains in its cultivation by its fruitfulness: accordingly, it is all cultivated by its inhabitants, and no part of it lies idle" (*Wars*, Book 1, Chapter 3.3.2). Another first-century writer describes the banks of the sea as growing fruit-bearing trees. The climate and fertile soil of Galilee around the sea make the land very productive, with such items as wheat, barley, figs, grapes, and olives produced in large quantities.

The Sea of Galilee stands in stark contrast to the Holy Land's other great body of water, the Dead Sea. Towns grew up along the shore of the Sea of Galilee because it was alive with plant and animal life, while the Dead Sea, because of its high saline content, makes for a harsh environment in which aquatic plants and animals cannot flourish. Locate these two bodies of water on the map. Note the relationship of the Jordan River to each body of water. One sea both receives and sends forth water, while one body sends forth none of the water it receives. What spiritual analogy can be drawn from the very different situations of these two bodies of water?

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The Sea of Galilee has been described as the Lord's delight or the sea that the Lord has chosen for himself, while the lands around the sea have been described as the crown of Galilee. This is the land in which Peter grows up, learns and practices his profession, and meets Jesus Christ. It is in this land that Peter makes the transition from a fisherman to a fisher of men.

# COMMIT – DAY 2

## WHY PETER?



From famous works of art such as mosaics, paintings, and sculptures, to massive architectural accomplishments, to good-humored jokes mentioning the keeper of the “pearly gates,” throughout the centuries St. Peter has remained an important and popular figure. Even today, the Pope claims the title “Successor to St. Peter,” and the famous St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City is a marvel to behold. In addition to all of these distinctions is the fact that the disciple Peter is mentioned more times in the Gospels than all of the other disciples combined—and he is always mentioned first. All this raises one question: Why is Peter so important?

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”*

—1 Peter 1:3

These words of St. Peter—from the First Letter of St. Peter—tell us a great deal about how the experience of following Jesus Christ made Peter the man he was. Called by Jesus of Nazareth on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Peter came face-to-face with humility at the deepest level, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). At that moment, Peter chose to follow Jesus—traveling with him, sitting at his feet, being taught, blessed, and corrected—ultimately bringing him to the place where he could later proclaim, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter preached the living hope that he had received—and that is still available to all of us through Jesus’ resurrection.



*St. Peter at Capernaum, photo  
© Augustine Institute*

As we saw in Dr. Gray’s teaching from our first session, Peter is in many respects an ordinary man. But in the midst of his ordinary life, he is called by Jesus to become an extraordinary disciple—an apostle, pope, martyr, and saint. Jesus calls a hardworking fisherman and faithful Jew out into a bigger story than Peter probably could have imagined. When Jesus says, “Follow me,” Peter gives him his whole life, to the very end. “Why Peter?” The simplest answer is, “Because Jesus called him.” And by the grace of God, Peter answers.

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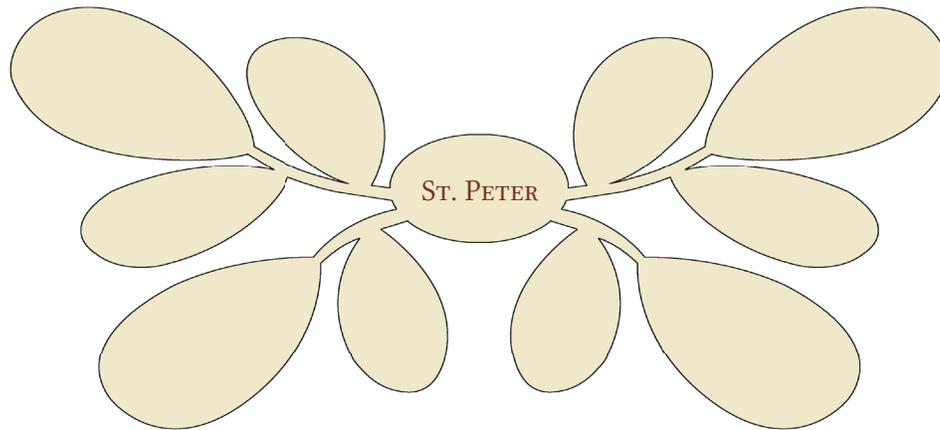
**HUMILITY:** The virtue of humility may be defined as “a quality by which a person considering his own defects has a lowly opinion of himself and willingly submits himself to God and to others for God’s sake.” (Catholic Encyclopedia)

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When starting a new study on a person or subject, it's often helpful to make a summary of what you already know, or think you know. This allows you both to fill in the gaps of your knowledge and to correct errors. What words, events, or ideas come to mind when you think about St. Peter? Come up with a few ideas, and use the word web below to help organize your thoughts.

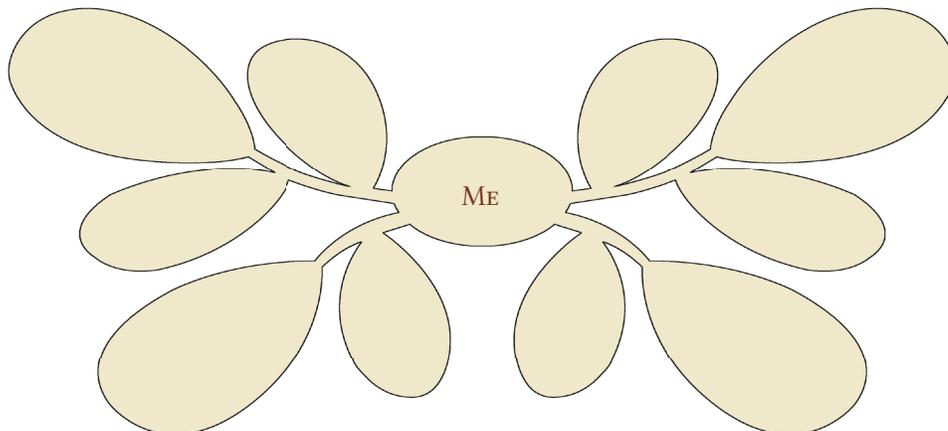
Here are some ideas to consider:

- What passages or stories from Scripture about the life of St. Peter come to mind?
- What historical events, traditions, or pieces of art depicting St. Peter do you know?
- What personality traits did St. Peter have? Strengths? Weaknesses?
- How would you describe Peter's relationship with Jesus?
- To what mission did Jesus call Peter? And how did Jesus equip Peter along the way?
- What questions do you have about St. Peter that you would like to have answered?



Peter was an ordinary fisherman living and working around the Sea of Galilee in the first century. What made Peter extraordinary was Jesus' call, and Peter's "yes." Like Peter, we too are ordinary men and women, but God has also called us and wants us to be his active and faithful disciples. Take a moment to answer some of these same questions about your own life. And as you study Peter, let what you learn from this model disciple form you more in the image of Christ.

- What passages or stories from Scripture are the most important to you? Which have made the deepest impression on your heart?
- What are some of the events that God has used in your life to call you, or to get your attention?
- What personality traits do you have? Strengths? Weaknesses?
- How would you describe your relationship with Jesus?
- What mission has Jesus called you to? And how is Jesus equipping you along the way?



# COMMIT – DAY 3

## INTO THE DEEP



When Jesus calls, Peter chooses to trust Jesus and allows him into his boat, his home, and ultimately his entire life. Pope Benedict XVI said in a 2012 General Audience address: “Christianity is not a religion of fear but of trust and of love for the Father who loves us.” From the example of Peter’s trust, we can come to learn how to overcome our fears and to better respond to our loving Father and follow Jesus Christ as his faithful disciples.

### LECTIO

The practice of praying with Scripture, *Lectio Divina*, begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read this Scripture passage in Luke 5:1-11. Then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

*“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*

How does Peter first react to Jesus’ instruction to “let down your nets for a catch”?

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Luke tells us that “the fishermen had gone out of [their boats] and were washing their nets.” What does this tell us about the fishermen? Are they getting ready to fish? Or are they done fishing for the day? How does this detail help us understand Peter’s first reaction to Jesus’ instruction?

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How does Peter react to Jesus after the miraculous catch of fish? Peter initially refers to Jesus as “Master” (v. 5). How does Peter refer to Jesus after the miraculous catch, and what does this reveal about what has changed in Peter?

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## MEDITATIO

*Lectio*, close reading and rereading, is followed by *Meditatio*, time to reflect on the Scripture passage and ponder the reason for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *Lectio*. Take some time now to mediate on Luke 5:1-11. Here is a short reflection and some questions to help you get started.



*The Calling of St. Peter and St. Andrew* by Giorgio Vasari,  
photo © Scala /Art Resource, NY

After a long night of work, in the early hours of the morning, Peter cleans his nets on the shore of Galilee, freeing them of debris and weeds, but not of fish. It was an unsuccessful night. As the sun comes up, Jesus too is hard at work teaching the crowds who pressed him on either side hoping “to hear the word of God” (Luke 5:1). Jesus steps into Peter’s boat and continues teaching. After Jesus stops speaking to the crowds, he turns and speaks directly to Peter, directing him to cast his nets yet again: “Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4). With these words, Jesus gives Peter an invitation to faith. Peter begins to protest, explaining that they have labored throughout the night and caught nothing. Peter is a seasoned fisherman; he has had good days and bad days fishing, and he knows when it’s time to throw in the towel. But the protest that looked to culminate with a “no” to Jesus’ request ends almost as soon as it began. What had Peter overheard as Jesus taught from his boat that morning? Was Peter reminded of the miracles Jesus had performed in Capernaum earlier (see Luke 4)? Hearing Jesus preach, did Peter’s respect increase for this rabbi who knew so well the Word of God? Did Peter feel curiosity at some of Jesus’ teachings? When Jesus stopped speaking, was there a longing in Peter’s heart to hear more? Whatever questions or curiosity still tugged at Peter’s heart, he had heard and seen enough to take the next step in faith and trust Jesus. Instead of saying “no,” Peter says, “But at your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). By casting out in faith, Peter provides the good soil for Jesus to work a miracle.

Imagine yourself in this scene. If you were in Peter's place, what would you have done? Would you even have let Jesus step into your boat? When Jesus tells you to cast your nets into the deep, would you tell him that it is useless to try? Would you trust him enough to actually cast your nets into the deep? In what areas of your life is Jesus calling you to trust him more?

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In response to the miraculous catch, Peter humbly recognizes his own sinfulness and falls at Jesus' feet. Jesus responds, "*Do not be afraid.*" Why does Jesus respond with these words? What is Peter afraid of? What would we be afraid of if we were in Jesus' presence in this scene? What would we be afraid of if we were in Jesus' presence right now? Scripture records many times that God says to his people, "*Do not be afraid.*" Some examples include: Genesis 15:1, Joshua 1:9, Isaiah 41:8-10, Luke 1:11-13, Luke 1:26-30. Why is this message so important? Why does God repeat these words so often to us?

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Jesus calls Peter, James, and John apart from the other Apostles many times in the Gospels (for examples, see Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 5:37-43, Mark 14:32-42). From Luke 5:9-10, what is the relationship between Peter, James, and John before they meet Jesus? How does this first relationship better prepare these three men as they follow Jesus and as he calls them closer to himself? How does God use relationships in your life to call you into a deeper relationship with himself?

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"Put out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4). By trusting in these words of Jesus, Peter's life is transformed. He will soon be catching more than fish; as a follower and a disciple of Jesus Christ, he will be catching souls. May we seek to faithfully follow his example of trust in God.



# COMMIT – DAY 4

## SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS

After Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Apostles return to Jerusalem and devote themselves to prayer as they wait for the promise of the Father, the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Acts of the Apostles records the scene for us, listing the remaining eleven Apostles, with Peter once again listed first. It is Peter who "*stood up among the brethren*" and in his words clearly recognizes the foreknowledge of God even in Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Peter too had sinned when he denied Christ, but unlike Judas who despaired, Peter trusted in God's mercy and forgiveness, and once forgiven, he returned to strengthen and lead his brethren.

Peter's first act of leadership after Jesus' ascension was leading the brethren as they chose the one who would replace the office once held by Judas. Before candidates were put forward, Peter articulated an important qualifier for one who is a disciple and apostle:

*"So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."*  
—Acts 1:21-22

If one is to be a witness to Jesus' resurrection, that one must have "accompanied," or been with, Jesus "all the time."

The importance of spending time with God, of often being found with him, and more importantly, God being "with us," is a theme that runs throughout all the Scriptures, beginning in the opening chapters. Already in Genesis 3, God walks in the garden in the cool of the day, but rather than walking with God, Adam and Eve hide themselves. Their sin brings exile from the garden and separation from God, but from that moment on, God will continually remind his people that his desire is to be with them. See for yourself in the following verses:

Jacob – Genesis 28:15

Joseph – Genesis 39:2

Moses – Exodus 3:12

Joshua – Joshua 1:5

Israel – Isaiah 41:10

Mary – Luke 1:28

Apostles – Matthew 28:20

## I WILL BE WITH YOU!

And even when his people kept turning away, God wouldn't be outdone; he sent his only Son, Immanuel—"God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

So it shouldn't surprise us that spending time with Jesus is a key qualifier for any disciple, because being "with us" has been a desire of God's heart from the very beginning. For the first Apostles, this was time spent walking, talking, sharing meals, and seeing and hearing all that Jesus did. Look up the following passages. Both Peter and John mention that they are passing on what they themselves saw and heard.

2 Peter 1:16, 18 \_\_\_\_\_

1 John 1:5 \_\_\_\_\_

Peter and John saw and heard these things because they spent time, a lot of time, with Jesus. While we can't follow Jesus' physical footprints in the dusty ground, we are still called to walk with him, spend time with him, honor and worship him, like the first Apostles. Peter and John spent time and conversed with Jesus; so too we are called to spend time with Jesus in prayer. Peter and John often watched Jesus (for example, they looked on in awe as Jesus was transfigured on Mount Tabor); so too we are called to adoration. Peter and John honored Jesus, sometimes falling on their knees before him; so too we are called to worship. Prayer, adoration, and worship are key ways that we spend time with Jesus Christ.

Peter and the Apostles spent time and conversed with Jesus. How do you spend time with Jesus? How do you talk with Jesus? How do you hear his response?

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Peter and John often watched Jesus (for example, they looked on in awe as Jesus was transfigured on Mount Tabor). How can you watch Jesus? When you look at him, what do you see?

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Peter and John honored Jesus, sometimes falling on their knees before him. How do you honor Jesus? What words or actions do you use to honor Jesus?

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As we spend more and more time with Jesus, what happens to us?

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St. Paul describes what happens when we spend time with Jesus: "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another ..." (2 Corinthians 3:18). Prayer, adoration, and worship are key ways that we spend time with Jesus Christ, and key tools that Jesus uses to change us into his likeness. And the more we are like him, the better witnesses we can be to Jesus and to his resurrection.

As a way to further commit your life to Christ, between now and our next session, try to find some extra time to spend with Jesus in prayer. If possible, try to arrive a few minutes early before Mass to enter more deeply into worship during Mass, or stay a few minutes after to make a thanksgiving after receiving Jesus in Holy Communion. If your parish has an adoration chapel, try to find a time to watch with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. And consider bringing a friend or family member with you as well, and in this way begin walking the road as a witness to Jesus' resurrection.



# COMMIT – DAY 5

## TRUTH AND BEAUTY

### Sarcophagus of Sabinas (front) – c. 300–325, Vatican Museum



This sculpture is the front panel of a woman's sarcophagus, dating from around 300. The carving contains six scenes, with three scenes appearing to the right and three to the left of an image of the deceased woman praying with her hands and arms extended. While additional figures appear in the carvings, the central figures are Jesus and Peter (with Peter alone appearing in each scene).

- 1) The healing of the woman with the issue of blood — The hemorrhaging woman appears kneeling next to Jesus as he reaches out to her. Peter appears just to Jesus' right (see Mark 5:24-34).
- 2) The healing of the paralytic — The paralytic appears carrying his bed after Jesus has reached out to heal him. Peter appears just to Jesus' right (see Mark 2:1-12).
- 3) The healing of the man born blind — The blind man appears to Jesus' right holding his walking stick, as Jesus reaches out to touch his eyes. Peter appears just to Jesus' right (see John 9:1-12).
- 4) The deceased woman praying — With three scenes on either side of her, the center image on the sarcophagus is of the woman who is buried in the stone coffin. She is shown in prayer with her arms and hands upraised.
- 5) The miracle at Cana — Jesus is reaching out with what looks like a staff to touch the three water jars, in which he turns the water to wine at the wedding in Cana. Peter appears just to Jesus' left. (see John 2:1-11).
- 6) Peter taken prisoner — Peter is at the center of the scene with a prison guard on either side grasping Peter's arms. According to legend, the warders were named Martinian and Processus, and were Roman soldiers assigned as guards of St. Peter and St. Paul while they were jailed in the Mamertime Prison in Rome during Nero's persecution of Christians after the Great Fire of Rome in 64.
- 7) Peter baptizes the warders (i.e. prison guards) — While the two great apostles were jailed in the Mamertime Prison, the two guards, Martinian and Processus, were converted to the faith and baptized in a spring of water that miraculously flowed in the prison.

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**SARCOPHAGUS:** a stone coffin, especially one bearing sculpture, inscriptions, etc., often displayed as a monument.

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The first four biblical scenes show several miraculous deeds of Jesus. Jesus is presented as a clean-shaven youth, taking on the imperial representation that was commonly used for sculptural images of Caesar Augustus throughout the Roman Empire. The image of a clean-shaven youth also recalls classical images of Apollo, the god of light and the sun, and thus also represents divinity. In portraying Jesus using the well-known representations of the Roman emperor and of the god Apollo, the early Christians were proclaiming that while Caesar may be the emperor of Rome, it is Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, who is the King of all kings.

Locate Jesus in each of the first four biblical scenes (scenes 1, 2, 3 and 5). What is Jesus doing with his right hand in each scene?

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In numerous places throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, God's right hand is an image of both his might and his powerful protection for his people. For example, what do the following verses say about God's right hand?

Exodus 15:12 (Note: God's people have just crossed the Red Sea in Exodus 14.)

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Psalm 139:9-10

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In the sarcophagus carvings, it is Jesus' right hand that touches the hemorrhaging woman and the eyes of the blind man, and reaches out both to the paralytic and his bed, as well as to the jars to change the water into wine. The God who marvelously freed Israel from Egypt and who protected Israel in all her wanderings is incarnate in Jesus Christ, and the miracles worked at Jesus' right hand testify to his identity as the Son of God.

What is Jesus holding in his left hand?

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Often in classical art, Roman senators, and even emperors were shown holding law scrolls. While we can't see specific writing on the scrolls Jesus is holding, if Jesus is working mighty deeds by his right hand and these deeds are witnessing to his divine identity, perhaps the scroll in his left hand is that of the Scriptures, that also witness to Jesus as the promised Messiah. If so, here in Jesus' hands we have both words and deeds witnessing to Jesus, the divine Son of God and promised Messiah.

In contrast to the youthful, regal Jesus, Peter appears with his signature curly hair and full beard. These features (along with later additions of Peter holding the keys and wearing blue and yellow robes) become signature identifiers of Peter in artistic works. In each scene on the sarcophagus, Peter's presence is as a witness to Jesus Christ. He repeatedly appears next to Jesus, sometimes peering over Christ's shoulder so as to see exactly what Jesus is doing. Here Peter displays both the key requirement and duty of an Apostle of Christ described in Acts 1:21-22:

*“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”—Acts 1:21-22*

Peter accompanied Jesus “all the time,” represented in this work of art by his appearing with Jesus in every scene on the sarcophagus. Because of this Peter was an eyewitness of Jesus' many mighty deeds, and he was also an eyewitness to the mightiest deed of all, Jesus' resurrection! After Jesus' ascension into heaven, Peter will give witness to all that Jesus did and taught, both in Jerusalem and to the ends of the world—even in Rome, the capital of the empire.

As we make our way to the last scenes, Jesus no longer appears, and the focus now is fully on Peter. What item in Jesus' hand in the miracle of Cana scene now appears in Peter's hand in the two last scenes?



*Sarcophagus of Sabinus, Vatican Museum, photo © Augustine Institute*

The staff-like object Jesus holds in the miracle at the Wedding of Cana is used to indicate that it is Jesus who changes the water in the jars into wine. The staff physically connects Jesus' hand to the miraculous wine in the jars. This staff unexpectedly appears in the hand of Peter as he is taken captive by the guards and then plays a similar function in the last scene as it did in the miracle at Cana, connecting Peter's hand to the miraculous spring of water, in which the two jailers will be baptized.

Jesus has passed on his Spirit, and thus his power, to the Apostles, and it is by this power that Peter will work miracles like Jesus; for example, Peter heals a lame man (Acts 3), people place their sick so that Peter's shadow would pass over them for healing (Acts 5) and Peter raises Tabitha/Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9). But the most incredible miracle is that of the living waters of baptism, provided by the hand of Peter to the warders, and to all the followers of Christ, the waters by which our sins are forgiven and we are adopted into the very family of God.

This brings us to the woman for whom this sarcophagus was hewn. She is portrayed in prayer in the center scene. Her stance is that of an *orans*. In ancient artistic forms, the *orans* posture of prayer was used both to represent a person offering prayers of intercession and to represent the soul of the deceased person in heaven praying for his or her friends on earth.

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**ORANS:** one who prays; a representation of a female figure, with outstretched arms and palms up in a gesture of prayer, in ancient and early Christian art (sometimes also *orant* or *orante*).

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The woman buried in this sarcophagus was obviously a Christian. She had heard the gospel stories of Jesus, like those carved on her sarcophagus, and had come to believe that he was the Christ. She, like the warders in the last scene, had received baptism, not by the hand of Peter, but by the hand of the Church, which continues to hand down from Jesus, and Peter and the Apostles, the apostolic faith. Trusting in God's mercy and his power, so beautifully displayed on her sarcophagus, she looks forward to the day that she might join the great cloud of witnesses around the throne of God, interceding for us to join her there.

As is shown in the scenes of her sarcophagus, St. Peter was an example to the woman buried within of how to be a disciple and witness to Jesus. How can St. Peter encourage you to be a better disciple and witness?

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned here. List any personal applications you got from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?

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