*I give You thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing Your praise; I bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your name for Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness, for You have exalted Your name and Your word above everything. On the day I called, You answered me; You increased my strength of soul. All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord, for they have heard the words of Your mouth. They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. For though the Lord is high, He regards the lowly, but the haughty He perceives from far away. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; You stretch out Your hand, and Your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of Your hands. Psalm 138*

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples: “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said: “Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them: “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 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.” Then He sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah.* Matthew 16:13-20

 *A college student came running to mother in tears: “Mom, you gave me some terrible financial advice!”*

 *“I did? What did I tell you?” the mother asked.*

 *“You told me to put my money in that big bank, and now that big bank is in trouble.”*

 *“That’s one of the largest and best banks in the state”- the mom said - “there must be some mistake.”*

 *“I don’t think so,”- the student sniffed - “They just returned one of my checks with a note saying: ‘Insufficient Funds’.”*

“You Are the Rock.”

1. When Matthew recalled Jesus’ calling Peter *“the rock,”* he indicated something about Jesus that was unique only to Christ. The Scriptures indicate that Jesus always knew everything about the person He talked to, because *“He knew what is in a person’s heart.”* I have always marveled at this revelation, because that particular ability of Jesus by itself proves that He is truly the Son of God and knows all of us. Since Matthew’s Gospel is written in Aramaic, Jesus calls Peter *“Cephas.”* That’s *“the rock,”* in Aramaic. In Greek, Simon’s name becomes Peter *(Petros)* which also means *“the rock”* in that language. Peter’s ministry might not have been as dramatic as Paul’s, (at least that is what we often think and say), because Peter was concentrating his work mainly on the Jewish Christians. I however believe that from his ministry and from the thorough knowledge of Peter as presented in the Gospels, although we, who are the descendants of the *“Gentiles,”* may learn a very valuable lesson about Peter and his ministry. We also can learn about Jesus’ ability to know what Peter’s capability was, and what would he be able to accomplish, even in the first encounter with him. According to the Gospel of John 1:42, Jesus already then said: *“You are Simon son of John. You are to be called* *Cephas.”*

2. Who was Simon? Originally, he was just a simple man, a fisherman by trade, a hardworking person. Contrary to Paul, who received a prestigious and excellent education, Simon was not a well-educated man. I suggest that he was not even as educated as Matthew, the former tax-collector or Luke, the physician. Peter was just a common and average man. Yet, because of the tremendous influence Jesus has had on him, Peter could not, and must be not, underestimated by any means. Yes, he was a man with many faults and we can easily see and find them in what we know about him, but he was eager to learn and to apply what he learned. So, what do we know about him?

* he was a very self-confident person; he was so sure of himself that he was willing to stake his reputation all too often: *“Even if they all will fail you, Lord, I will not.”* These were Peter’s words to Jesus at the *“Last Supper”* in the *“upper Room,”* and yet we know the outcome. He denied of even knowing Jesus.
* *“You will never wash my feet,”* he tells Jesus, *“I will not allow you to humiliate yourself.”* It was unthinkable for Peter to have his *“Teacher”* to perform a menial task of a slave. And yet, when Jesus explains the importance of the task, he said: *“Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!”*
* In a moment of great enthusiasm, he calls Jesus *“the Messiah – the Savior,”* and yet, just a few minutes later rebukes Jesus: *“This must never happen to you”* and Jesus must reply to him: *“Get behind me, Satan!”*

3. Peter was a very impulsive man. He often spoke first, and thought later. His feelings controlled him while his reason wasn’t there yet. In a dream he tells God: *“I will not eat anything that is unclean.”* So, God must tell him: ‘Do you know who you argue with?’ *“What God has made clean you must not call profane.”* He was indeed a man full of many flows, but he was always himself, he did not try to be someone else. He never pretended. He always said what he had in mind. For some, this is a very dangerous conduct and to a certain degree this was also dangerous to Peter. Dangerous, because most people do not like to be told the truth, especially bluntly, yet Peter was not afraid to do so, even when he spoke of himself: *"Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"* (Luke 5-8)

4. Still, he had the ability to be a natural leader. When all the disciples were desperate, following Jesus’ crucifixion, he says: *“I’m going fishing”* and the other disciples follow him. If Peter was not a natural leader, the others would not follow him, after all they saw and knew that he was wrong many times before. They all have seen him drowning when he asked Jesus to be able to walk on the water. He looked at Jesus with faith and was able to conquer the fear of the waves, but when he looked at them, he became scared and begun to drown so, Jesus had to save him. This might have been just one of the failing moments in his life and yet, when he goes fishing, the others followed.

5. I find the following words from the Book of Revelationfascinating: *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spit you out of my mouth.”* They are the indication to all of us of what God wants us to be. Peter too was sometimes *“cold”* and sometimes *“hot,”* sometimes in opposition and sometimes in favor which made him to be occasionally *“on the other side of the fence,”* on the wrong side, but most of the times he was on the right side. He would never sit on the fence though and play it safe. I only hope that today many Christians and even the Church leaders would be like Peter, not playing it safe, not trying to please and to accommodate everyone. Unfortunately, it is much easier to compromise one’s views, even beliefs, that to remain firm and grounded in faith.

6. When Jesus met Peter for the very first time, He knew that Peter is the man with tremendous possibilities. He knew that Simon is impulsive, but trustworthy. Jesus knew who Peter was and who Peter may become. He was able to see all his qualities and this was important for Jesus. He knew that Peter’s weaknesses may and will become his strengths eventually. In calling Simon *“the Rock”* Jesus re-emphasized the importance of Peter’s commitment to Him and His Gospel. Jesus promised Peter not only to become who he had become, but He also promised Peter to be with him and to help him. Jesus’ message was important to Peter and is also important to us, because we too, need to know that God is there to help us, and that only He may make all the necessary changes in our lives, so we may become who He wants us to be.

7. The lesson from today’s reading is that God does not want to force us to be who He wants us to be, but He wants us to be like Peter and to be able to make our own decisions. He encourages us to obey His call. He encourages us to call Jesus our Savior, but He would never act contrary to our will. In the end it is us who decide to follow Jesus and to embrace His teaching, therefore we cannot expect His will, His message to accommodate our whims, no matter how much we may want. We must remain solid like the *“rock”* on which the Christ’s Church has been established. The decision to follow Jesus did not indicate the *“end”* of our life’s journey, but rather the proverbial *“first step”* in the life-long journey. Peter left the fishing boat and following Jesus learned from Him, and then Jesus placed on his shoulders the tremendous responsibility. The same happen to us. When we made the first step in life with Jesus, we begun the process of learning and growing.

8. Peter has fallen many times in his life but Jesus was always there for him when he needed Jesus. We may fall in our life over and over again, but we have this great assurance from Jesus: *“I am with you always, until the end of times.”* Peter was ready to keep on going despite his falls. The message from Peter’s lesson is not to be perfect and never fail but to be always ready to press on. We may learn from Peter, we may learn from Paul, and we may learn from all the saints who are now with the Lord, that if we fight a good fight and we strive to faithfully follow Jesus, we will hear these familiar words: *“Well done, good and faithful servant.”* We do not need to feel discouraged when we fall. We do not need to be discouraged when nothing seems to be working the way we hoped it would, but must be always ready to press on. To get up on our feet and to continue our journey with Christ for *“He is with us.”* Always!