

Peter claims to have left everything to follow Jesus, but he can't stay awake for an hour to pray. Peter claims he will never deny Jesus but he resorts to violence in the garden then later denies Him three times and curses the woman who recognizes him. Peter wants to stay on the Mountain with Moses and Elijah, but he has not earned that place. Peter wants to pretend he loves Jesus when he really just wants to save his own skin. Peter is a fake, a phony.

Like Peter, we are all phonies. We are all eager to deceive. We all tell other people's stories and pretend they are our own. We even get angry when we're called on it. What is so wrong with us that make us lie like that? We pretend we did and said things we didn't. We deny what we did say and quibble about what we meant. We spend more time worrying about our appearances than the truth, more interested in our own personal public relations than with our neighbor's reputation. We exaggerate and mislead. We are liars without honor. We say what we think we are supposed to say and hope no one can see deep into our hearts where we even lie to ourselves. We have lied so much we can't keep track. We are all phonies, faking our way through life. We are just like the politicians we say we can't stand. Why do we expect any more from them? Of this we need to repent.

Peter was a phony. But Jesus loved him anyway. Moses was a murderer and a coward, but Jesus loved him too. Elijah was full of self-pity and despair, but Jesus still loved him. But here is the truth: God is love, His mercy endures forever. He paid the price to redeem them and you. He laid down His life in your place, to set you free and forgive your sins, to make you whole and give you hope. Peter's lies did not stop Him. Jesus loved the real Peter - the one that Peter was afraid to let men see, the lying, cowardly, lusty, greedy, lazy Peter. Jesus loved him and wanted him for Himself. Jesus wanted Peter to be His brother. He wanted Peter to be His immaculate, clean, and innocent Bride; to be with Him forever in a new paradise, free from Satan and temptation, free from his own betraying heart. Jesus also loves you and me, despite our lies and our faults. He loves you and me no less that He loves Peter, Moses, and Elijah.

But that love cannot be accomplished by staying on the mountain of Transfiguration. Jesus must come down from the mountain. God in the flesh must go to Jerusalem and face the full force of man's hatred and brutality. The Son of God must endure the lies of the Sanhedrin and the cowardliness of Pilate and the rejection of His disciples. Jesus must endure suffering and shame, crucifixion and death. But this is why He came. God has taken man's flesh upon Himself, to become the once and for all perfect sacrifice. Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. As He promised to Adam and Eve, the serpent must bruise His heel. The Messiah must pay with His life. And Moses and Elijah, sealed in bliss, are not ashamed of it. They love it. They rejoice in it. They are eager for it. For this is what Moses and Elijah longed to see, this is what they had preached, this is what they prayed for, this is what they hoped for during their earthly lives. It is in Jesus' suffering and death, that God shows His love for the world, where the Father is made known to us, that God's mercy is understood. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is where men are drawn to Him, where the serpent that deceived Eve is overcome and the curse of sin is removed.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot avoid suffering and pain and shame; don't even try. And do not let this make you feel sad or guilty. For Jesus has authority to lay down His life. No one takes it from Him. This is who He is, this is what He wants, this is the will of His Father, the work of the Spirit, the love of the Son. The day Jesus dies is a good day, the best day, the day that the Lord made that we would rejoice and be glad in it. For the day Jesus died, the Day the builders rejected Him, He took death to the grave. That is why the dead rose on Good Friday. On that day death lost its hold, its sting. On Good Friday death died. The serpent's head was crushed and the battle was won. On that Day Jesus said, "It is finished".

Jesus, the Son of God, came to pay the price for our rebellion against God. Jesus came to make good on the promises preached by Moses and Elijah. Jesus is not a phony. He is real. He is more man than we and He does not lie or fail, He does not sin. He grows weary. His task is hard. It hurts. He agonizes and He suffers. That is real blood that falls upon the ground. He is God but He is also Man. He feels every blow that strikes Him. He is forsaken by His Father, counted as a sinner with the rest of us, and bears the punishment for every sin ever committed - until it kills Him.

But then it is done. Death is dead. Life lives. Jesus rises from the tomb. For the Son of Man has authority to take His life up again. And that is why He multiplied the loaves, turned water into wine, healed the sick, controlled nature, raised the dead, cast out demons, and let His Divine nature show through His human nature on the mountain of Transfiguration; because that is who He is. Jesus is true God and true Man. Jesus is God with us. He came into creation to restore creation. The rocks and waters worship Him. Death and sickness, demons and hunger flee before Him. Mystery of mysteries! That is who Jesus is and that is what He does, that you and I would be spared hell's fire and brimstone, that you and I would know His love, that you and I would be forgiven and cleansed. That you and I would be true in Him, that you and I would be joined to Him as one. That you and I would be like Him; comfortable to be who we are inside - not the liar, not the phony - but the real you, the real me. That we would be the Bride of Christ, that we would bear His Name and wear His white robe, given to us at our Baptism. That we would eat His body and drink His blood. That we would live by every word that proceeds from His mouth. That we would wait for His final coming. These things that Jesus has come to do for us and declares to us; that is not phony. They are real. These holy and precious things of God, His Word and His Sacraments, they make us who we are. They give us and make us participants in Jesus death and resurrection, His cross and grave.

Just like Peter before you, despite his flaws and weaknesses, is now Saint Peter by grace in Jesus Christ. In Jesus name, he is forgiven and he is perfect. Peter is now restored to the image of God, the way God intended Him to be. He now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Soon, you and I, will bear that same title that Peter enjoys. You and I will be saints of God, heirs of His kingdom. You and I will be seated with Peter and James and John and Moses and Elijah and all the company of heaven in the presence of God, singing His praises. That is not some pipe dream. That is not some scheme. It is real, because Jesus is real. All of that is ours because Jesus came down from the mountain. Thanks be to God. Amen.