

The Salmon Ladder

There is a Ninja Warrior gym in Calgary and I got a chance to try the 'Salmon Ladder' where you essentially have to take a bar half a meter long and jump up about six inches onto the next rung, and you have to do this several times. So I jumped to grab the bar and was gearing up to jump onto the next rung about six inches away. So one, two, three...BANG! I tried to go for the rung but I didn't go high enough so I fell. So I wanted to try again but this time I was more afraid because I was afraid to fall again so one, two, three...SMASH! I was going to give it one more try but at this point I didn't think I could do it so when I tried again, BAM, I fell.

Sometimes the next rung on the SALMON LADDER OF HOLINESS seems beyond our reach that no matter how many times we have tried to ascend to its heights BY OUR OWN POWER we always seem to fall short.

This feeling of falling short is very much on the mind of Peter today. Jesus is having breakfast with Peter and some of the other disciples by a charcoal fire—the same charcoal fire that Peter warmed himself as he was denying the Lord. As he sat there eating the fish he had just caught, Peter could not help but think of his threefold denial of the Lord.

But our Lord is allowing Peter to overcome his threefold denial with a threefold profession of his love, but watch carefully what happens. When Jesus says, "Simon, son of John do you LOVE me?", the word for love in the Greek that he is using there is *AGAPE* which represents the self sacrificial love of laying down one's life. Jesus said before that "Greater love has no man than this, greater *AGAPE* has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

Notice how Simon Peter responds. "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." The word that Peter uses there is *PHILOS*, indicating the love of friendship.

So Jesus is saying, "Simon son of John will you lay down your life for me in SELF SACRIFICIAL LOVE?" but it is as if Peter is responding, "Yes Jesus you know that I'm your buddy!"

What happened to Peter? Peter who was willing to fight the soldiers and prevent them from taking Jesus, Peter who said “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life”, Peter who said “Lord why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you” (Jn 13:37)?

Peter who tried to jump for the heights of sanctity BY HIS OWN POWER came face to face with his human weakness during the Passion of our Lord and fell flat on his back, and now he is afraid to be bold with his love.

Are we not like Peter in so many ways?

He is conscious of his weakness as we are when we have denied the Lord through mortal or venial sin. We who have yearned for the heights of sanctity of loving our Lord and neighbor sacrificially see how we fall short.

We like Peter know the frailty of our love and say “Jesus you know everything, you know how weak my love is.” But he looks at us as he did with Peter: he looks at us with love and says “Follow me”.

“Follow me even though your love is weak because it is NOT by your love alone that you will love me. I will send the Holy Spirit who is the very Love of the Father and the Son, the Love with which I redeemed the world will be BLAZING in your soul so that one day you too can love me with a GREATER LOVE by laying down your life.”

Our tradition tells us that St. Peter was crucified upside down during the persecution of Nero. He who was unsure of his love became so confident that he was willing to lay down his life. As we await the coming of the Spirit this Sunday, may he fill our hearts with a greater love so that in jumping for the heights of sanctity, we may not fall short of the Father’s arms.