

The Failing Rock

Matthew 16:21-23; Luke 22:54-62; Galatians 2:11-14

WHAT WE FOUND

We read every failure at full volume. Five verses after "you are Peter," the rock became a *skandalon*, a stumbling stone: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:23), for thinking on the side of men. In the courtyard, the rock denied three times, and "the Lord turned and looked at Peter," and he wept bitterly (Luke 22:61-62): the weeping that separates contrition from despair. And at Antioch, Paul "opposed him to his face" before everyone (Galatians 2:11), and Paul was right.

Then the anatomy that decides everything: Peter's *doctrine* on the question was correct and on the record (Acts 10:34; 15:11). Paul's own word for the sin is *hypokrisis*, hypocrisy: conduct betraying Peter's own true teaching, cowardice at a lunch table, "fearing the circumcision party." Grave and scandalous, yes; an official act binding the Church to error, no. Nathan rebuked David to his face, David repented, and the crown stayed (2 Samuel 12): God's offices survive God's rebukes of the men in them. St. Augustine's verdict: Peter's humble acceptance of public correction was the rarer and holier example. St. Catherine of Siena proved the pattern permanent, correcting a pope fiercely while calling him sweet Christ on earth.

What was never promised: sinless, brave, or wise popes (CCC 1550 says so plainly). What was promised: a prayed-for faith (Luke 22:32) and a revealed confession (Matthew 16:17). What that protection is, exactly and narrowly, is where this study ends. First, one more question: where did Peter's "follow me" lead?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine *Letter 82, to St. Jerome*

In their famous dispute over Antioch, Jerome suggested the confrontation was staged for effect; Augustine insisted it was real, because Scripture does not lie, and then drew the lesson that settles tonight: Peter, by humbly accepting public correction from a junior colleague, left the Church a rarer and holier example than Paul's boldness in giving it. It is a greater thing, Augustine says, to be corrected well than to correct well.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyprian of Carthage *Letter 71*

Cyprian points to Antioch as the office's true style: Peter, whom the Lord chose first and on whom he built his Church, did not answer Paul's challenge by insolently claiming his primacy and demanding obedience from a latecomer; he yielded to truth presented rightly. For Cyprian the scene disgraces neither Peter nor the primacy; it displays the humility that makes the primacy Christian.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Catherine of Siena *Letters to Pope Gregory XI*

A thirty-year-old laywoman and future Doctor of the Church wrote to the pope himself with astonishing frankness, urging him to return his see to Rome, to be a courageous man and not a coward, and to uproot the corruption around him, all while calling him "sweet Christ on earth" and maintaining deep reverence for the office throughout. Catherine is the permanent Catholic proof that fierce correction and full communion are not opposites.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Pray Psalm 51, David's psalm after Nathan, once each day this week, as Peter's psalm and as yours.

2.

Identify one place your behavior contradicts your stated convictions, one act of practical hypocrisy, and correct the conduct, not the conviction, this week.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, when Peter's successor is weak, send him a Paul and a Catherine, and give him David's heart to hear them."

MEMORY VERSE

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **2 Timothy 2:1-2** and **Titus 1:5**, watching for how many generations of teachers appear in a single verse. Then read **Acts 20:17-32**, Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, and mark every shepherding word you find.

Catechism Connection: CCC 1550; 890-891; 1429