

## From Saint to Satan in Sixty Seconds

[Text - Matthew 16:13-25]

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In this morning's New Testament reading, Simon Peter quickly goes from being a solid rock upon whose profession of faith Jesus is prepared to build the Church, to being a stumbling block who Jesus sharply rebukes. One minute, Sainly Simon is being praised for his *Divine* insight into Jesus' identity; and the next, Jesus tells him, "Step back, Satan....for you are setting your mind, not on Divine things...." It's hard to fathom how a rock-solid "Saint" can be re-tagged as a sinister "Satan" in such short order; which is why I think it's important that we take a closer look at what those two designations might mean.

Theologically, a *Saint* is someone whose life is grounded in and guided by Divine Love and Grace; and *Satan* is one who tries to pull people away from trusting in that Gracious Love. That was Satan's role in ancient Hebrew literature - a *tempter*, who from the beginning tries to entice people away from trusting in the Holy One. And apparently, this dynamic is at work in today's New Testament reading.

After asking his disciples who other people think he is, Jesus brings the question home: "Who do *you* say that I am?" Simon professes, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God!" Now that's a stunning and sensational statement! To declare that Jesus is *The* Messiah [or in Greek, the *Christ*], is to claim that he's the One to whom all the prophets of old and John the Baptist were pointing - the Anointed One who will usher-in a Divine Realm of Justice, Compassion and Peace. And Jesus doesn't deny that title! In fact, he complements Simon, calling him *Petros* - the Rock. 'Rocky, you've got it right! This is who I am, and this solid affirmation is the firm foundation upon which I will build my

Church - a grace-filled community so strong that even the powers of Hell will not prevail against it.' And then Jesus orders his disciples to tell...*no one* that he is the Messiah!

Wow! That's a *Game of Thrones* kind of plot twist! First Jesus stirs-up this discussion about who he is; gets his disciples all fired-up about it; and then orders them to keep it quiet! No doubt Jesus has his reasons for doing this; and Simon Peter quickly reveals what one of those reasons might be. Like many people in First Century Judea, Peter believes that the Messiah will bring-forth a Divine Realm by exercising tremendous power - punishing the *bad* people [who were, obviously, their enemies], and rewarding the *good* [who were, obviously, themselves!] Yet Jesus' understanding of his role as the Messiah is completely different. Jesus comes, not to violently stir-up revolution in the streets, but to peacefully build-up compassion in the hearts of all people. And Jesus recognizes that within *all* our hearts, there is the potential for both good and bad, faith and doubt, liberating love and debilitating fear.

Jesus chooses to trust completely in the Power of Divine Love and Grace to change people's hearts and lives. Yet he knows that challenging and changing people with unconditional love, can be far more dangerous than confronting and controlling them with coercive fear and force. And he also wants his followers to know the risks involved. So, Jesus begins to "show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering...and be *killed*; and on the third day be raised." This is when Peter takes him aside and rebukes him, "God forbid it! This must never happen to you." But Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me Satan! ...for you are setting your mind, not on Divine things, but on human concerns."

Jesus trusts that Divine Love and Grace is the way to change people's lives; but Simon Peter listens to his inner voice of doubt

and fear. So Saint Peter behaves more like Satan - a *tempter*, who tries to pull Jesus away from the path of self-giving love, and onto the path of self-protecting fear. This doesn't mean that Peter is a bad person; it means that he's like every one of us, whenever we allow our fears to override our faith.

For example, when I encounter someone in need, my willingness to step-in and get involved often depends on whether I listen to my *fears*, or to my *faith*. My fears tell me: "This guy could be dangerous....I'd like to help, but her story sounds a bit sketchy....I've done this kind of thing before and have been burned....Maybe if I ignore them, they'll just go away!" On the other hand, when I listen to the voice of Faith, and trust that *any* encounter I have contains a Divine aspect - and a positive potential - then I will take the chance and get involved. When I remember that the Holy One has blessed me with far more than I need, and I trust that my Sacred Source is present in that moment, then I'll strive to be fully present for and gracious toward the person I encounter

You and I *can* listen to our fears - carefully guarding our time, our resources, and our lives. Unfortunately, by doing so, we miss-out on so much of Life, and Life's awesome possibilities. Our desire to not be "taken-in" by others, becomes our reality, as we shut ourselves off to those around us - avoiding the risk, but missing the reward that comes from living freely and fully as Children of the Holy One.

Jesus puts it this way: “Those who try to save [or cling to] their life will lose it; but those who lose their life for my sake [my purpose of sharing Divine Love] will find True Life!” For Jesus, these are much more than words. Jesus *lives* his life, and *gives* his life, trusting that the Divine Source of *All* Life is ultimately in charge. So in spite of the dangers around him, Jesus centers his life in Divine wholeness and peace - which allows him to convey that peace and wholeness to all those around him. And this same approach can still work for you and me today! As you and I put our trust in the Good News of Jesus Christ, we become genuine partners in Christ’s reconciling and redeeming work in this world. We become those faithful *saints* whose lives are grounded in and guided by Divine Love and Grace. And as an added bonus, we even get to tell Satan where to go!