

# +Saint Benedict, Abbot

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey

July 11, 2019

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

*At that time: Peter said to Jesus: Behold we have left all things, and have followed thee: what therefore shall we have?<sup>1</sup>*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,  
My Very Dear Sons,

As we know from the words of the Gospel just quoted, the promises made to Peter were not trifling. “Amen I say to you, that you who have followed me, . . . And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or lands for my name’s sake shall receive an hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting.”<sup>2</sup> Sometimes we find in Holy Scripture the literal and obvious fulfillment of a prophetic promise; other times we believe God’s word but cannot discern the exact meaning of what is predicted, being therefore unable to appreciate how the promise may or may not have become a reality. What about this promise Jesus makes to Peter and to those, who like Peter—religious, monks, in particular—give their lives to follow Christ, hoping to receive God’s special blessing? Did Peter, indeed, receive the hundred fold of the things he left behind?

In terms of a father, mother, and brethren, we know that Saint Peter, in place of his one known brother, Andrew, not only was able to keep the latter (although in a new relationship), but also acquired a great number of spiritual brothers, including his fellow Apostles and a considerable number of Disciples. Saint Paul mentions that after the Resurrection Jesus appeared to “more than 500 brothers at one time.”<sup>3</sup> It would make sense that Saint Peter knew all or most of them, considering them his own family. We would *not* say, on the other hand, that Peter acquired a hundred mothers in the place of his own; nevertheless, there were a number of holy women among the Disciples, and Peter’s relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, surely counts as more than a thousand fold blessing in this domain.

As first Pope, the first Bishop of Rome, Saint Peter, had to leave his wife and home in Galilee along with all his possessions, but espoused as it were the primitive Church, in the same manner as every bishop is said to espouse, to wed, his diocese. As the Church grew following the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord, Peter’s flock comprising the first generation of the faithful was greatly multiplied, not counting the numberless cloud of Christians that would belong to him as a spiritual progeny over the centuries and millennia.

We do not know how many acres of land in town, or maybe along the lakeshore, Peter the fisherman of fish may have possessed in Capernaum where he had a house in the time of Jesus’ public life,<sup>4</sup> or in Bethsaida, where he seems to have been raised.<sup>5</sup> But in a real sense, when he went, first to Antioch, then to Rome at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, he entered into a role that put him in possession, we might say, of the entire Roman Empire. It was especially the lands of the Roman Empire which were the principal field of action of the evangelization that was just beginning. The fact that he died a martyr in Rome, in any case, was no accident. It suffices to read some of Saint Leo the Great’s

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 19:27.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:28-29.

<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 15:6.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Luke 4:31-32; 38.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John 1:44.

sermons on this topic to understand how Peter was led to lay down his life in this place that was then the capital of the world.

In one sense, however, this prophecy made to Peter about the hundred fold of things left behind seems to have failed. After the Resurrection, we find him fishing in the same little boat he always had: no improvement there. True, the number of fish Peter was able to bring into the boat was greatly increased. The first miraculous catch, reported in the Gospel according to Saint Luke,<sup>6</sup> took place at the beginning of Christ's preaching, after Peter was instructed to "put out into the deep." The second, narrated by Saint John,<sup>7</sup> followed Christ's rising from the dead. Both were astounding, net-breaking, events that proved the principle of the hundred fold blessing in Christ's company. But the boat? In truth, all that Saint Peter finally received in the way of a greater earthly boat was the mast, a wooden mast, in the form of the Cross, to which the fisher of Galilee was nailed voluntarily upside down so as not to try to rival the Master.

In truth, Peter *did* get a new boat and not merely a mast. The boat is just so big that we cannot see it a first glance. The boat, the great ship, he received, was the very Barque of Peter, the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, the true Ark of Salvation, of which Noah's vessel was only a pre-figuration. This is the boat outside of which there is no salvation, and we are the happy spiritual fish, whom the fisherman, operating through the power of Christ, has caught and brought into the hold.

Today is the feast of Our Blessed Father Saint Benedict. He too renounced all in order to follow Christ. Like Saint Peter, the Patriarch of the monks of the West received a hundred fold on earth. In the place of his parents and one sister we know of, Scholastica, together with the family estate in Norcia, he became the father of a multitude of sons, enough to fill twelve monasteries, and was able to build the great abbey crowning Monte Cassino. The mast of his monastic ship was likewise the Cross, the Cross of monastic obedience and observance, the same Cross that carries the sails of our own monastic ship at Clear Creek.

The thing most important to remember in all of this, however, the true *unum necessarium*, is not the promise of the hundredfold of possessions on earth. The real promise given to Saint Peter and then to Saint Benedict was essentially that of life everlasting. This is the precious pearl, the treasure hidden in a field, and the reason for all the rest. We monks have left many persons and things behind, not in hope of a hundred fold of earthly blessings, though we too have come into a certain hundred fold of these things, but in an effort to reach the true goal of human existence raised up to the supernatural status of the sons of God, not only for ourselves but for all men, women, and children, if this were possible.

Sometimes monks, like the prophets of old, are called upon to give public witness to the Truth of Christ, whether by denouncing injustices committed by the powerful of this world or by assuming under obedience, by mode of exception, the task of preaching. More often, however, our mission is simply to be what we are, men of penance and adoration, thereby giving pause to those who live in moral or spiritual darkness and imparting encouragement to men and women of good will to live in the light. May we all follow Saint Benedict, Our Blessed Father, along that luminous road he traveled in death (as seen by some of his disciples in prayer) up to the Starry Kingdom of Life Everlasting. Amen. Alleluia.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 5: 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> John 21:11.