

# Jesus and Peter

## Column 1 (top)

The whole spirit and soul of Peter seems illuminated from within even as the 17th Century Dutch painter Rembrandt is revealing the outward humiliation of Peter's actions. The painting tells of the betrayal of Jesus' first disciple. Peter repeatedly promised during their last time together that he would follow his master to prison and to death, then denies his master when he finds himself in danger. Rembrandt bases his depiction of consecutive episodes in Luke's Gospel and packs the events into one scene taut with drama. The main and monumental figure of Peter the Apostle, wrapped in a light-colored cloak, becomes recognizable in the light of a candle and is looked at with suspicious glances by those around him. Meanwhile, within ear-shot, Jesus' interrogation takes place in the background. The picture's closed composition and the life-size figures are squeezed into a confined space -- accentuating the desperation of the situation. There is not only fear on Peter's face but also inner astonishment and recognition of the gravity of his deed, since Jesus turns towards him, reminding him of what had been said earlier: Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times. Peter remembers these words and weeps bitterly.

## Column 1 (bottom)

Indian artist, Frank Wesley reveals the prayerful symbolism of his painting. On the bent back of the humiliated disciple are two golden claw prints of the cock. Three hands cover Peter's profile, yet this does not seem odd or disturbing. They represent the three denials. All about his shoulders and bowed head, gold leaf glows, blending into blue and black of the dark night of the soul. Even in Peter's extreme mortification, God is here waiting to redeem the moment. To visualize this instance of grace, Frank Wesley has worked gold leaf into the mixture of color behind the figure of Peter enriching the emotional impact of this work. When painting Biblical scenes, Artist Wesley avoids literal representations of Scripture in favor of familiar gestures of heartache and loss, symbolically picturing Peter's silent impasse and sense of mystery from within the dark.

## Column 2 (top)

The three roosters perched on this stark cross on the evening of Good Friday by Australian artist Geoff Todd, may suggest Peter's own crucifixion, caught often in his own cross-purposes. Many Gospel accounts reveal Peter torn between belief and disbelief, between definite certainties and regretful self-reproaches. For all his unpredictable behaviors, Peter was one of the most Be-loved of Jesus. While completely committed to follow his Teacher, Peter was sure of walking on water to meet him -- even as his feet were sinking into the lake. Or again, Peter utterly refuses to have his Teacher wash his feet. "Never, ever!!" He says emphatically. Then without a missing a beat and just as convincingly --- he consents to be washed -- but not just my feet. Wash my hands and my head as well. And finally, Peter risks declaring publicly and absolutely, You are the Messiah yet later, a much frightened disciple sells out his Teacher: Don't know the man -- never seen him before. Through all his ambivalences between certainty and doubt, Peter learned -- excruciatingly slowly, through such honest extremes -- how essential humility is to his love of God.

## Column 2 (bottom)

African artists from Northern Cameroon conceive the full story of Peter's early Friday morning hours. This is a dark painting relieved by momentous spotlights of brilliant reds and yellows. The action takes place in an outdoor court yard, where Peter warms himself by a camp fire. Surrounding the fire, local soldiers armed with spears. A neighbor woman dressed in native African clothes interrogates him as the roar of the crowd behind him heightens Peter's anxieties. Hovering in the background, dressed in a vivid red tunic, his beloved Teacher and Lord is enduring the bullying cruelties of an angry crowd. For Peter, this early Friday morning is a supreme moment of truth in his life, and his repentance becomes cherished conversion, an unforgettable transformation, a new humility, a deeper compassion, and grateful love of the One who lives still -- in us and among us.

## Column 3 (top)

French artist and stained glass designer, Marguerite Hure exposes the very moment before the cock (seen in silhouette before Peter), will crow for the third time. Peter stands in a half light, gesticulating to a stranger, his vehement denial of knowing Jesus -- while his Master waits -- unseen, behind Peter. Starkly backlit in a doorway, Jesus waits. He waits, unobtrusively -- for Peter to turn his numbed conscience around -- He waits, already bruised and beaten by the crowd, and waits for Peter to remember his promises and wake up. Peter cursed and swore an oath, "I do not know this man you are talking about." 4.

## Column 3 (bottom)

In *And Peter Wept Bitterly*, an unknown artist leaves his fine sketch of a grieving, repentant Peter. And God said, "I will wipe away your tears from your eyes. There will be no more death, no more mourning or sadness. I am making the whole of creation new." (Rev. 21: 4-5)

