

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our reading this morning puts our patron, Peter, front and centre of the Gospel story.

There's a concept in business leadership known as the Peter principle. It's the idea that everyone who is good at a particular role is promoted to another role until finally they reach a level of incompetence and so remain incompetently in that leadership position leading incompetent until retirement. Obviously, such a theory remains highly contested and is almost possible to see at work in government, the church, or our own places of work and elsewhere in society... ahem.

I always thought the Peter principle was a little unfair on our own patron Peter. It seemed to sum up bits of Peter's character but over looked his basic well-meaning attempt to try to understand and get things right, even if he was a little headstrong. It might have been true that is tendency to rush head first into things is why he rose to leadership in the early band of Christ's followers, but it was slightly unfair to say he went on to demonstrate incompetence in that role.

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that Peter wisely guided the early Church through controversies raging as furiously as they do even in the Church of our own day. Then of course, I realised the Peter principle wasn't named after our Peter at all by the author who made it popular in management theory.

That said, Peter displays some elements of the principle which shares his name. He rushes in, demonstrates that he's quick to understand, but then fails to realise the consequences of his new understanding. He sees Jesus walk on water, rushes to do likewise, and then begins to panic and sink. He protests Jesus' prediction he will deny Jesus three times by following Jesus to trial, only to deny him in the very act of trying to accompany Jesus through his suffering and death. Peter is always so near and yet not quite.

In our Gospel reading this morning Peter makes his confession of faith, truly understanding who Jesus is, 'the Messiah, the Son of the Living God'. Jesus responds: 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.'

‘Yes, you’re absolutely right Peter’, Jesus says. You’re the first to get it Peter, on your realisation of who I am I’ll build my Church. Well done Peter!

Then immediately following our Gospel passage, Jesus goes on to spell out what it means for him to be the Messiah. “that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life”. At this point, Peter, true to character, demonstrates his understanding of Jesus is so near to the truth and yet not quite.

Peter takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him. We’re not given the words of the conversation, but we can almost imagine Peter in true middle-management style. ‘Jesus, come on. This Messiah thing is great, truly wonderful. I love it. But the whole suffering and dying thing, I’m not so sure, maybe we can just stay with being the Messiah and not undergo the whole suffering bit?’.

At this point, Jesus in turn rebukes Peter for not getting the implication of what it means for him to be the Messiah: If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?

Here Peter takes on his true leadership role. His misunderstanding helps our understanding. If we're tempted to put ourselves first, to preserve our comfort, to gain as much of the world and of money and of stuff as we can. We're missing something. Lots of my friends who are now reaching places in their career or levels of income for which they've longed, and are quite possibly reaching their own levels of incompetence.

As my generation begins to live out the Peter Principle, we're also coming to realise that for even those who've achieved and gained everything they've ever wanted, there's still more to life.

Life, the Christian life, is not so much about what you can *assume*, *consume*, or *acquire* but about following Christ to where you are truly called, even if that involves laying down as well as taking up. This calling will look different for each of us. We've each been gifted callings that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

The Christian life is not about how far we can reach until we display our incompetence, but about discerning where we're called according to the particular gifts given to us through God's providence. Discerning this call is a life-long task, which none of us can do by ourselves however competent we might be. It requires the wisdom of all our fellowing siblings in Christ to help us as we discern together to what it is each of us are called as we find our place in the body of Christ: For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another'.