

The Master's Man

From the start, he was his master's man. It was a friendship with "vast historic consequences," but it was a friendship.

I. It began in affection.

Simon was likely in his 20's. He was already married and hard-working. He supported himself, his wife, and ailing mother-in-law by selling fish he caught in Lake Galilee -- no small task, believe me. He was a serious fellow. Jesus was older, about 30. The two liked one another from the start, though they were not very much alike. Simon -- Oh, Simon -- was a more typical Galilean: hot-headed, sensitive. He needed a mature friend. In the carpenter of Nazareth, he found one. Jesus gave him a name that matched his need: "Peter," he called him -- "Rock." It didn't fit him, but Simon must have accepted his nick-name good-naturedly. He was too impulsive to be called "Rock," but the presence of his friend did have a steadying influence on him. Strange, it was Jesus who should have been called "Rock" -- but his friendship was strengthening to the younger man. I think he must have liked for Jesus to call him "Simon the Rock" (Simon Peter) -- even though it made him smile a bit, for he knew it was not altogether true. The two were friends.

If there is a moral in this first point, it is: never be afraid of affection. Everyone needs a friend to balance him. A scholar too much alone in his study, a saint too much alone at his altar, an executive too much alone at his desk -- is soon an unbalanced man. In a way, the psychiatrist, the priest, and, often, the physician, owe much of their profession to the fact that so many lack a friend. Warm, human understanding, shared at the heart of life's matter, is a prerequisite for sanity. I have never known a mean man who wasn't a lonely man. The cruelty of the world is not, I think, over-due either to ignorance or to education -- but to isolation, to the bridges of kindness being all down, and every man being afraid that no other man is his friend.

No marriage, no business, no treaty will last if the partners in the covenant are not partners. (Groom to bride: "Howdy, partner." @) Almost everything creative in the world is dependent upon finding and keeping friends.

The Christian Church had its start in the friendship of two men: "Upon this rock, I will build my Church." Simon, called Peter, was, in a real sense, the Church's first member. The Church today, to be the Church, is still "the company of Christ's friends." We are still "the

Master's Men." There is today the strongest band of affection between us and our Lord. This is as it should be. As Peter would say, even today, "Lord, thou knowest that we love thee." And he would still reply: "Love one another."

II. But in the friendship between Peter and Jesus, there was more than mutual affection, which heals the heart of its hurts, there was also mutual admiration, which sparks the mind and will. (A burst of affection – may be only an initial impulse – only admiration holds it steady: true of all partnerships.)

There was much that Jesus found admirable in Peter: he was inquisitive, asking all the wrong questions that needed to be put right in the group and he was loyal and courageous, daring to play detective in Caiphas' courtyard, to see and, if possible, save his friend on the night of his false arrest, when all the other disciples had fled, and if Peter bungled it badly, the Gospels do not say the look Christ-in-chains gave him was one of rebuke, for was it not one of tender kindness, of his admiration for Peter's trying to help him, his being there at all, even if he made a mess of it, his eyes saying, "I believe in you, Simon, no matter, you have stood by me like a rock!" Was it not Jesus' admiration of, his faith in and hope for a far from perfect young friend that set this "Rock" to weeping? I think so. Otherwise, at Jesus' resurrection, would he have said, "Go ... tell Peter"? He deserves his name – more than he thinks.

This is what puts a man on his feet again, especially when he's tried and made a mess of things. It's when a friend, in spite of everything, takes you in. It isn't denunciation, it's admiration – the ability to see the admirable in spite of the deplorable. In Jesus, we still have such "a friend, that sticketh closer than a brother." Through the eyes of Christ, God still "looks upon us," and if we weep, it is because we know we do not deserve; there is nothing admirable in us, but if God thinks so, God knows we will try again, and again.

And if there was admiration in the eyes of Jesus for his friend, Peter found almost too much to admire about his Lord.

For if affection led to admiration – admiration almost led to

III. Alienation. And that is the 3rd point. (Now listen carefully, so you won't misunderstand me.) As Simon Peter came to know Jesus better and better, as he had him in his home, became a regular student of his teaching, taking notes on his lectures, which Mark later used to write his Gospel, watched him at work, Peter more and more marveled at the person Jesus was; he was more and more impressed with the work Jesus did, called him "Master" with

deeper and deeper meaning, until it almost separated him from his best friend. It seemed to sweep over him suddenly one day, and, says Luke, Peter “fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

All at once, the requirements of being his Master’s man seemed too much for him. He was overcome. He couldn’t possibly live up to it. (The Jesus style of living was beyond him.)

The example of his Lord was too perfect (haven’t you ever felt this way?). His teachings were too noble. His spirit was impossible for poor Peter to attain.

It was not hate or jealousy of his Master – far, far from it. It was, as often happens in life, love he felt he couldn’t live up to, loyalty he couldn’t manage any longer.

So youth sometimes says to parents, or one partner will say to another, or a man will suddenly say to his God: “Depart from me! I’m not what you think I am! I can’t be! I’ll never be! Go away! Leave me alone.” Sometimes adding, “I don’t believe in you any more.” But the real motive is: “I don’t believe in myself any more – I don’t see how you can possibly believe in me.”

But Christ would not leave, would not forsake his friend. The moment of alienation passed, and in its place, there was born in the heart of the master’s man, a quiet hope, a new ...
IV. Acceptance – of his Lord and of himself. For Peter came to realize that he was not supposed to be another Jesus, for Jesus was more than Jesus: “Thou art the Christ, Son of the Living God.” That was different. It was a revelation to Peter. Jesus was Master. And he, Peter, was only supposed to be his Master’s man, his follower, his friend, to be the best that he could be, for other men. That was all – that was all – the good Lord expected of him. That was enough. “Feed my sheep,” Jesus had said to him. That, Simon Peter could do. That he did. He led the Church out into the world “with vast historic consequences,” and the Master went with them.

Let us pray:

O Master of us all, let not thy very perfection keep us from thee. Thou art the pioneer. We can never be like thee, nor do what thou canst do. Yet thou hast opened the way, and thou didst say, “Follow me.” So we come, so late, and so long a way behind, often lagging, often stumbling, often falling, yet we come. We hardly know why we strive, except we sense thine eye upon us, thou our friend, who seeest through the worst in us to the best in us, and hast

promised to see us through to the end. Master, we only know we would be thy loyal friends.

Amen.

Grace,

Mercy,

Peace – from God,

The Father,

Son,

And Holy Spirit,

Be with you,

Always ...

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