Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Harden not your hearts” (Psalm 95:8).

Nm 20:1-13; Matt 16:13-23

By pairing the story of Moses at Meribah with Peter’s profession of faith at Caesarea Philippi, the Lectionary invites us to compare two key stories about leaders who were tested by water from a rock.

In Numbers 20, the Israelites, who failed to enter Canaan, withdraw back into the desert and begin again immediately to complain about lack of water and to blame Moses for bringing them out of Egypt. The account is mysterious in that Moses apparently commits some unnamed breach of faith that will prevent him from leading the people into the Promised Land. Like Martin Luther King Jr, he will see it but not get there himself before he is called home to God.

Was it because Moses struck the rock twice, a sign of doubt or hesitation in following God’s instruction, or was it some other sin? We aren’t told, but his offense provides a parallel with Peter, who, despite his graced insight into Jesus as the Christ, also failed when tested on the night Jesus was arrested and tried by the Sanhedrin.

Despite Moses’ failure, God’s promise to issue water from the rock in the desert is fulfilled, and the people are saved. Peter is himself the rock struck, not twice but three times, when he repeatedly denies even knowing his master, condemned to death and on his way to the cross. Peter’s failure, by God’s grace, will yield a

baptism of tears that prepares him to lead the Apostles in preaching God’s limitless mercy for sinners.

Peter commits a humanly unforgiveable sin by abandoning his dearest friend, someone he knew was the Christ, out of cowardice. Yet his failure becomes the rock and foundation of the church by revealing God’s unconditional forgiveness. Jesus rehabilitates Peter at the Sea of Tiberias with a triple profession of faith and love. If Peter, our first pope, can be saved, anyone, even the worst sinner seeking God’s forgiveness and love, will never be turned away.

“If today, you hear his voice, harden not your hearts,” either by doubting God’s love for you or by denying the same love to anyone in need of it.

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