

Peter's Wife: Just Imagine

I was conversing with a good friend recently on the subject of Peter, his personality, his character, and his inquisitive, impulsive, at times overconfident, vacillating temperament. The discussion started with the very familiar foot washing episode in John 13 where Jesus tells Peter that he's next in line to have his feet washed. Peter's response? "Nope! No way...LORD!" "LORD, are You going to wash my feet?" "You'll never wash my feet." And then, after a semi-lecture from Jesus, Peter responds, "Not just my feet, but my head and my hands!" In other words, "Give me a bath!" Welcome to typical Peter. Think about his words: "No", combined with "LORD". The terms are mutually exclusive and they might be rephrased this way: "No, Master", "No, You Who are my authority", or "No, You to whom I have given my allegiance." While we laugh at Peter's many inconsistencies, take time to ask yourself whether his character and actions are really that unfamiliar. Enough said on that facet of Peter.

The discussion segued to Peter's wife. Although very little is known about her from Scripture, and with thoughts of Mother's Day forthcoming, I began meditating on what she might have been like. My friend commented, "She was probably the calm, steady, down-to-earth one, since he [Peter] was the vociferous, impulsive, impetuous, fly-off-the-handle type." That's probably a fair-minded assessment.

Well, what we know about Peter's wife is found primarily in three Bible passages: Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, and Luke 4:38-39. In the references to Peter's nameless wife, attention is also given to her equally nameless mother. Although Roman Catholicism would like to claim Peter as its first Pope, and subsequently discredit the fact that Peter had a wife, Scripture is quite emphatic that he had both a wife, and a live-in mother-in-law, who was healed by Jesus. From 1Corinthians 9:5 we know that Peter's wife accompanied her husband on some of his missionary journeys. We do not know why the name of this noble woman who was a faithful partner of Peter during the days he fished for a living, and then during the long years of his apostleship, is hidden from us. Peter's epistles in the New Testament were written after his surrender to Christ, but behind him, similar to many men attaining eminence in history, is a sympathetic, discreet and understanding, woman.

Naturally, Peter was an impulsive man, and had a tendency to quit when things went against him. Coming home in such a mood we can imagine how his wife would reason with him, caution him to go slowly, and encourage him to rise above trials and disappointments. I can imagine her as very quiet by comparison, soft-spoken, and serving a lot of fish dinners. In sickness she would be his comfort, as she was when her mother was stricken with fever. We are not told whether there were any children in their Capernaum home. If there were we are sure that Peter's wife was the best of mothers. When the Apostle came to write his two epistles, and described in them ideal womanhood and wifeness, did he have before him the example of his wife, as one who was equal to, subject to, her husband, and worthy of all honor as the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:1-12)? Did she inspire Peter's description of a modestly dressed woman who thought more of the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit than gaudy apparel? I sense that she was a most worthy wife who was willing to be hidden in order that the cause of the Master to whom Peter and she were dedicated, might be advanced and adorned.

Tradition has it that Peter's wife was the daughter of Aristobulus (a high priest), so that while Mark is described as "sister's son to Barnabas" (Colossians 4:10) he was also brother-in-law to Peter. There is also a touching legend concerning Christians in Rome who ceased not to urge Peter to escape when seized and cast into prison so that he might continue to be of service to the church at large. The Apostle yielded to their entreaties and somehow escaped, but when free on the open road he was arrested by a vision of Christ, and he asked Him, "Whither art Thou going?" The glorified One replied, "I am come to Rome to be crucified a second time." Peter, humiliated, turned back to prison. When death came, his wife was martyr first, and as she was led out to die, Peter comforted her with the words, "Remember the Lord." When Peter's turn came he begged his crucifiers to crucify him head downward, feeling he was unworthy to die in exactly the same way as his Lord. In heaven, Peter and his loyal wife shine together as stars for having turned many to righteousness.