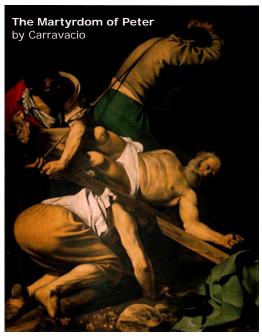
THE APOSTLE PETER Acts 5:27-32,40-41, Psalm 30:2,4-6,11-13, Revelation 5:11-14, John 21:1-19

Feed my Lambs.

At that time, Jesus revealed himself again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He revealed himself in this way. Together were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We also will come with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, have you caught anything to eat?" They answered him, "No." So he said to them, "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." So they cast it, and were not able to pull it in because of the number of fish. So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples came in the boat, for they were not far from shore, only about a hundred yards, dragging the net with the fish. When they climbed out on shore, they saw a charcoal fire with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you just caught." So Simon Peter went over and dragged the net ashore full of one hundred fifty-three large fish. Even though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come, have breakfast." And none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they realized it was the Lord. Jesus came over and took the bread and gave it to them, and in like man-

CFC FFL ner the fish. This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to his disciples after being raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." He then said to Simon Peter a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Simon Peter answered him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." Jesus said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that Jesus had said to him a third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, "Follow me."



REFLECTION: Do you love me? (John 21:15) Jesus' questioning of Peter in such a direct way was not intended to make Peter feel guilty. And neither was it an ego trip for the Lord. Jesus didn't need Peter's love to feel better about

himself. He already knew—better than Peter himself—how much Peter loved him. Rather, Jesus wanted Peter to reach deep within himself and see how much love for the Lord was actually there.

Jesus questioned Peter at a pivotal moment to show that Peter's love for him was greater than any opposing power that might try to keep him bound in the memory of his failures. He wanted Peter to see that while he would make mistakes, his love for Jesus could still cover a multitude of human failings. This was probably one of the most encouraging interrogations anyone could experience! True, Jesus' questions must have disturbed Peter. But in the end, they actually restored his faith in himself as a child of God and as a chosen apostle. They helped Peter understand that even in spite of his imperfections, he could still serve Jesus fully.

Today, Jesus asks each of us, "Do you love me?" even though he already knows the answer. We should welcome this kind of questioning. He doesn't doubt us. He only wants to burn away any unbelief in us with the fire of his love—a love that will create an even deeper love for him in our hearts.

Today at Mass, welcome Jesus into your heart so that he can expand your capacity to love. Yes, you will make mistakes; no one is sinless. But know that as you declare your love to Jesus, he will strengthen you and empower you to take up the work he has called you to. Then your love for him will become the visible proof that his kingdom really has come to earth. "Jesus, you know how much I love you. Continue refining me with the fire of your love so that I may love you more and show my love to you and my neighbors

Mon, April 19

Acts 6:8-15; Psalm 119:23-24,26-27,29-30; John 6:22-29 Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8) Stephen was originally chosen to "serve at table," to oversee the distribution of material goods, because the task was consuming too much of the apostles' time. The apostles were supposed to be praying, preaching, and teaching, but they also knew that practical ministries like food distribution were just as important. So they took extra care to choose deacons of exemplary holiness as well as But what do we see Stephen doing? He worked miracles, he countered opponents' objections, and he was the very first to suffer martyrdom. He probably did help with the distribution of food, too, but that didn't seem to warrant much of Luke's attention as he was writing Acts. Sometimes we wish we could perform more visible, "important" ministries in the church instead of the humble, hidden tasks that may come our way. However, far more important than what we do is how we do it. Anything—from preaching to selling bazaar tickets-can be done in our own strength or in the grace of the Lord. What counts with God is the attitude with which we do whatever task lies before us. As Mother Teresa put it, greatness consists in "doing small things with great love." So many saints have followed in Stephen's footsteps. Blessed André Bessette wasn't smart enough to become a priest. He served as a doorkeeper-and gave all the credit to St. Joseph when peo-

ple began to experience miraculous healings when he prayed for them. St. John Vianney was sent to an obscure town where faith seemed to be dormant. He spent most of his ministry hidden in the confessional—and people flocked from all over France to find their faith resurrected in his presence. Let's ask these saints—as well as Stephen-to help us say ves to whatever we're asked to do, and to do it in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we look intently at Jesus, may our faces shine as well, drawing those around us

Tues, April 20

love in me."

closer to Jesus. "Jesus, I am

willing to go wherever you

send me and do whatever

everything with love, your

pleases you. Only let me do

Acts 7:51-8:1: Psalm 31:3-4,6-8,17,21; John 6:30-35 Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.... Do not hold this sin against them. (Acts 7:59,60) Every now and then, you hear about someone who 'died a beautiful death." Most often, this is said about people who died in their beds after having said their goodbyes and made their peace with God. Stephen's death was beautiful in a different way. There is nothing pretty about being pelted with stones until your organs fail. But Stephen's martyrdom was a thing of beauty because he died the way Jesus did. It wasn't just that Stephen was falsely accused, charged with blasphemy, and killed outside the city walls. It wasn't even that he had a final vision of "the Son of Man" that recalled what Jesus said at his own trial (Luke 22:69). Even

more striking is how Stephen prayed as the stones rained down on him. He commended his spirit to Jesus, as Jesus had commended his to the Father, and he imitated Jesus in asking forgiveness for his executioners (Acts 7:59-60; Luke 23:34,46).

What enabled Stephen to face this excruciating death so peacefully? There's only one explanation: He was "filled with the holy Spirit" (Acts 7:55). From the very first moment Stephen accepted the gospel, the Holy Spirit had been at work—changing him, empowering him, making him more like Jesus. This was the secret to his Christlike living and dying. It was his most outstanding characteristic. Today, take the example of Stephen's transformation as God's personal word to you. Right now, no matter what your circumstances, God is inviting you to ask for a greater release of the Holy Spirit in your life. He wants to help you think and act like Jesus a little bit more today. He wants to help you choose holiness over sin today in a way you never thought you could before. Just keep your eyes and ears open, and you'll detect his work.

Remember: The Spirit really does want to do for you what he did for Stephen. So seek him, listen to him, and follow his lead. In that way, both your living and your dying will become something beautiful for God.

"Holy Spirit, I turn to you now in faith and grati-tude. Help me to open my life to you in a deeper way today. Whatever it takes, please make me like Jesus!"

Pray unceasingly!

Wed, April 21

Acts 8:1-8; Psalm 66:1-7; John 6:35-40

Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst. (John 6:35)

These are amazing words! Essentially, Jesus is promising that his gift of the Eucharist can satisfy us so deeply that we no longer hunger for earthly rewards. But is this a promise we can really experience? Or was Jesus just exaggerating to make a point? Perhaps some words from St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) can help us: "If you have a light, and

the whole world should come to you in order to take some light from it, the light itself does not diminish," she wrote. "Suppose that there are many who bring their candles, one weighing an ounce, others two or six ounces, or a pound, or even more, and light them in the flame. The whole light is in each candle, whether large or small—the same heat, the same color, and the same flame.

"Nevertheless, you would judge that the one whose candle weighs an ounce has less of the light than the one whose candle weighs a pound. Now the same thing happens to those who receive this Sacrament. Each one carries his own candle."

Catherine saw that even though we all have the same "wick"—the faith that we received at baptism—"the soul becomes more or less bright according to the material which it brings to the fire."

So while the whole of Jesus' life and love is available to us at every Mass, it's not always the case that we re-

ceive it all. That part is up to us. It's a matter of recognizing the darkness of need within us and trusting that Jesus' light can overcome it. It's a matter of dwelling on the goodness of the Lord throughout the Mass so that we become confident that he wants to fill us up to overflowing.

Jesus is the light of the world, and his light continues to shine in the darkness, setting us free from sin, giving us his words of inspiration and hope, and telling us how much he delights in us. So how big of a "candle" will you bring to him? "Lord, help me to sense your presence more deeply in the Eucharist. May the light of my faith grow

Thurs, April 22

brighter in the fire of your

love!"

Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 117:1-2; John 6:52-59 Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me. (Acts 9:17) What must have been going through Ananias' mind when the Lord told him in a vision to pray with Saul of Tarsus? Yes, he had heard of Saul. The whole church was aware of this violent enemy. In fact, the word was that the high priest had granted him permission to search the synagogues in Damascus and arrest all the followers of Jesus. Saul seemed bent on wiping out all believers. So why would the Lord tell Ananias to have anything to do with this man? But the Lord assured Ananias that Saul was now a believer, so he went to him as a brother. Ananias had been called to take the radical

step of loving an enemysomething Jesus taught repeatedly while he was on the earth. And as a result of his cooperation, Ananias became an instrument of healing, forgiveness, and restoration for Saul.

We can never know exactly where on the path toward Christ someone is-not even our enemies. And neither can we know just how essential our prayers, words, or actions might be in helping someone on that path. We should remember, too, that our "enemies" aren't just people who are out to get us! Jesus is calling us to love the people we find difficult to love, people like the poor or the emotionally disturbed. We may find it hard to see how the Spirit is working in people with whom we have a longstanding grudge. Or we may not be able to see the needs of people who seem to have it all together, and yet who are looking for meaning in their lives. Whatever the barrier, Jesus calls us to see everyone as our brother and sister, as fellow members of his body.

Instead of thinking of reasons why you should be wary, try asking the Lord to help you see people like these in the same way that he sees them. The more you take on his heart and mind, the more you will become convinced that you don't have any enemies—just people who are waiting to become your friends!

"Thank you, Jesus, for calling me to play an essential part in your plan! What a wonder that you would allow me to join you in building your kingdom here on earth!"

Friday, April 23

Acts 9:1-20: Psalm 117:1-2: John 6:52-59

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"Thank you, Jesus, for calling me to play an essential part in your plan!

Interruptions: Our Real Work Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were Henri Nouwen once commented that he used

Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go" (Jn 21:18).

work until he realized that, often times, interruptions were his real work.
There's a lesson here: We're often resentful when our plans are interrupted.

to be resentful whenever he was interrupted in his

IN EXILE
BY RON ROLHEISER

Saturday, April 24

Acts 9:31-42; Psalm 116:12-17; John 6:60-69 Jesus Christ heals you. (Acts 9:34)

After Paul's conversion, the church seems to have enjoyed a bit of a respite, a time of peace and calm. Without one of its chief persecutors, it was able to grow in number as well as in the Spirit. If there were newspapers back then, such dramatic growth would have probably made the headlines. Some pundits may have even wondered what the world was coming to when a ragtag group of fishermen and tax collectors could be hailed as miracle workers. Peter would have answered such questions by proclaiming that his was a God of power and authority. By healing a paralytic and raising a woman from the dead, he was pointing people to the risen Christ, in whose name he performed all these wonders. But Peter was not out for headlines. Yes, God used him to make his power known, but also to demonstrate his care and concern for people. He used Peter to show the people how much he could do if they would just turn their hearts to him. God still wants to demonstrate these same wonders to the people of today. But we need to ask whether we have lost some of our sense of expectation for these wonders. Do we think that the world has become too dark for God to act in it? Do we think that God loves us less than he loved Peter and the others? Or do we think that we are less deserving of God's time and attention than the first believers? How quick we are to complicate matters! Simply put, the church grew because God poured out his Holy Spirit upon a thirsty people. It grew because a few people stood in awe of who God was and

ple, trusting faith!

"Jesus, I believe that you want your church to grow in number and in power. Come and raise my expectations. I believe that you can do all things. Come, Spirit, and demonstrate your power, your love, and your compassion!"

longed to see him work in the world. They had a

passion for evangelizing—and real expectations.

They believed that God would bring to completion

what he had started in Jesus, and that he would use

them to fulfill his plan. May we have that same sim-

Sometimes these interruptions are minor, an unexpected phone call while we're working or watching television. Sometimes though they're major: an unplanned pregnancy that interrupts our career, an economic hardship that derails our plan for being a writer or an artist, a family situation that prevents us from pursuing a dream, or a loss of health that puts everything on hold.

Countless things, big and small, perennially conspire against our agendas and sabotage our dreams. Often we're resentful and think to ourselves: "If only! If only this hadn't happened! Now I have to wait to go back to school, to resume my career. Now I'll never have a chance to fulfill my dream." Sometimes in middle age, or even earlier, this resentment takes a more radical form: "I've wasted my life, been a victim of circumstance, given in to the demands of others, and now I'll never get the chance to do what I really wanted."

But the opposite is also true: Sometimes instead of resentment there's gratitude because we realize that the interruptions, so unwelcome at the time, were really salvific and, far from derailing our real agenda, were our real agenda.

A couple of examples might help explain this: I'm sure all of us have known individuals or families where an unplanned pregnancy suddenly turned all plans (economic, career, travel, new house) upside down. Initially there was resentment. Later on the unwanted interruption turned into a much wanted and loved child who helped create a happiness that dwarfed anything that might have resulted had original plans not been derailed by that interruption.

The British historian, A. N. Wilson, in a biography of C. S. Lewis, describes how Lewis' life as a teacher and writer was, during virtually all of his productive years, interrupted by the demands of his adopted mother who made him do all the shopping and housework and demanded hours of his time daily for domestic tasks. Lewis' own brother, Warnie, who also lived in the household (and who generally refused to let his own agenda be so interrupted) laments this fact in his diaries and suggests that Lewis could have been much more prolific had he not had to spend countless hours doing domestic chores.

Lewis himself, however, gives a different assessment. Far from being resentful about these interruptions, he's grateful and suggests that it was precisely these domestic demands that kept him in touch with life in a way that other Oxford Dons (who never had to shop and do housework) were not. Wilson agrees and suggests that it was precisely because of these interruptions, which kept Lewis' feet squarely on the ground, that Lewis was able to have such empathic insights into the everyday human condition.

As these examples illustrate, what initially is experienced as an unwanted interruption can, in the end, be our real agenda.

Of course, this isn't always true. Our lives are not meant to be

We must obey God rather than men

Reading I: Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41

The apostles had been arrested for preaching while under orders to desist. In a tremendous gesture of defiance that has been the inspiration of the Church in all times of persecution, they replied, "We must obey God rather than men," and they started at once to



preach to the Sanhedrin, enabling Luke to give us another fragment of the primitive Christian kerygma.

The most striking feature here is the concept, highlighted in the caption to this reading, of a double witness—the apostles and the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26). The Spirit and the apostolic word are both necessary.

Without the Spirit, the word becomes a dead formula, no longer speaking meaningfully to the contemporary situation, while without the word, the Spirit becomes uncontrolled enthusiasm divorced from the original witness to the Christ-event.

left entirely to circumstance. We're meant too to make choices, hard choices at times, to actively shape our own destiny. It can be unhealthy, fatalistic even, to simply accept whatever happens. It can also lead to considerable bitterness and disappointment with our lives. We have God- given dreams and talents and must, in the name of the God who gave them to us, fight too for our agenda.

However, we must also look for the hand of that God in our interruptions. These often appear as a conspiracy of accidents through which God guides and tutors us. If we were totally in control of our own agendas, if we could simply plan and execute our lives according to our own dreams with no unwanted demands, I fear that many of us would, slowly and subtly, become selfish and would, also slowly and imperceptibly, find our lives devoid of simple joy, enthusiasm, family life, and real community.

Baptism means derailment. Christ baptizes Peter on the rock when he tells him: "Your life is now no longer your own. Before you made a profession of love, you fastened your belt and walked wherever you liked. Now, others will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go." To submit to love is to be baptized, namely, to let our lives be forever interrupted. To not let our lives be interrupted is to say no to love.

C. S. Lewis once said that we'll spend most of eternity thanking God for those prayers he didn't answer. I suspect we'll also spend a good part of eternity thanking God for those interruptions that derailed our plans but baptized us into life and love in a way we could never have ourselves planned or accomplished. We do not live by accomplishment alone and sometimes what's best for us can only be learned conscriptively.

Responsorial Psalm: 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11-12, 13

The hope of a future resurrection is found only in some of the latest parts of the Old Testament and is absent from the psalms.

When the psalmist speaks of being brought up from

SCRIPTURE IN DEPTH

By REGINALD H. FULLER

Sheol and restored to life, he is using metaphorical language to describe deliverance from earthly troubles (in this case probably illness).

But Christian apologetic, followed by liturgical piety, interpreted the psalm

Christologically— the "I" who speaks becomes Christ, and the deliverance becomes his resurrection.

Reading II: Revelation 5:11-14

This is John's vision of the heavenly liturgy, of which the liturgy of the Church on earth is a reflection (see the Eucharistic preface; in the picture the four living creatures and the elders suggest the participants in the Christian liturgy of the time).

Christ is addressed as "the Lamb who was slain," that is, the paschal lamb, a tradition going back at least to 1 Cor 5. Is this actually a fragment of the early Christian paschal liturgy?

Gospel: John 21:1-19

This story, widely regarded as an appendix to John's Gospel but apparently composed by members of the Johannine school, is in surprisingly close contact with early tradition.

It probably goes back to the first appearance of the Lord to the Twelve by the Lake of Galilee. Here it is set in the context of a meal.

At some stage this primitive story was combined with the miraculous draught of fishes that figures in Jesus' earthly ministry (Luke 5). Some think that the story there is a retrojection of an appearance story into the earthly life, but the current trend is to regard John 21 as a projection of the earthly miracle in a resurrection context.

The number 153 has symbolic significance, though the evangelist does not explain. Clearly it has some connection with the mission of the Church, which the apostles are commissioned to inaugurate.

In verses 15-19 we encounter another story that goes back to very early tradition, namely, the first appearance to Peter, in which the first of the apostles is entrusted with the pastoral care of Christ's flock (see also Matt 16:17-19 and Luke 22:31-32).

To this early tradition has been added a final paragraph containing a prediction (regarded by New Testament scholars as ex eventu) of Peter's martyrdom. This is the earliest reference to that event and its only mention in the New Testament.

"Do you love me?"

Peter in the Acts of the Apostles, so bold and courageous, testi-

fies, "Better for us to obey God than men!"
Even with strict orders not to preach, in the rattle of menace from high priestly interrogation, he remains intrepid. He proclaims the risen Lord who "brings repentance and forgiveness of sin." Despite further threats, Peter and his companions leave the arena, happy that they were worthy of ill treatment.



How did Peter ever get over his failure? Such a calamity. The embarrassment alone should have incapacitated him. Three times, we are told, he denied even knowing Christ. (In my earliest school days, this somehow seemed the greatest crime. The Russians—or Romans—would come, breaking

Peter

THE WORD ENGAGED
BY JOHN KAVANAUGH

down our doors. All we would have to do to win safety was deny that we were Catholics, deny Christ. With such a high standard of faith, would we even have allowed the likes of Peter into our classroom after his betrayal?)

Peter, nonetheless, must have been used to failure. Even his first admission of sin brought not rebuke from Jesus but, "Follow me." So he followed. He later scaled the heights. With his famous profession of faith—"You are the Christ, the son of the living God"—he got his name: Rock, the sure foundation. Had Jesus been a bit ironic? Within moments, Peter was refusing to accept Jesus' destiny. Not Jerusalem and death! No ignominy! It will never happen! The rebuke was enough to stop a truck. "Get behind me; you have the thoughts of Satan." But Peter, who was perhaps too thick to register the reprimand, just got behind Jesus and continued to follow.

His thickness, or maybe the fact that he was used to his own inadequacy, allowed him to continue following, even after the catastrophe of his denial and his Lord's death.

They navigate the sea of Tiberius, Peter and the gang. "I'm going fishing." How must he have felt, especially at that instant when he and his fellows were challenged about their fishing? The voice from the haze undoubtedly breached a dike of memories from earlier days. "Children ["Lads," the Knox translation puts it], have you caught anything to eat?"

As before, there was nothing. And as before, the sheer power of Jesus' presence was felt on the waters. When they cast the nets on the other side, there were so many fish they could not haul in the catch.

On hearing "It is the Lord," Peter plunged into the water to find him once again. Next we see the fire, the fish and bread, the disciples still stammering about who he might be. Then come those wondrous words spoken to Peter.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Lord, you know I love you." "Feed my lambs."

"Do you love me?" "Feed my sheep."

And yet a third time, "Do you love me?"—which, we're told, hurt Peter. I wonder why.

"Lord, you know everything, You know well that I love you."
Pause a moment. There is something great stirring here. Have
you or I ever uttered those words to another? "Do you love me?"
Most of us, once beyond childhood, are terrified at the thought of
asking such a question. It is hard enough for some men to tell the
beloved she is loved. But it can be excruciating to ask, "Do you love

Questions for Bible Study

BY ANNE OSDIECK, SAINT LOUIS CENTER FOR LITURGY

Acts 5, Verses 27-32, 40-41

- 1. "We gave you strict orders, did we not, to stop teaching in that name." Why the negative attitude and all the objections from the Sanhedrin? How are you with interpretations of God's word that are different from your own?
- 2. The apostles rejoiced that they had been found worthy to suffer and receive dishonor. When you encounter suffering in your life is there anything that helps you accept it? What would make a person "embrace" suffering? Do you know anyone who suffers but also exudes a kind of spiritual joy? Revelation 5, Verses 11-14
- 1. Why is it right and just that "everything in the universe, cry out: "To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever."
- 2. Why is Christ called the "Paschal Lamb"? How are cross and resurrection unified in the image of the Paschal Lamb? How is this image a model for the Church?

<u>John 21, Verses 1-19</u>

- 1. Jesus was on the shore. John and the other disciples were in the fishing boat. Why do you think John recognized Jesus before the others? Discuss.
- 2. How important was Peter's triple profession of love for Jesus? Would Jesus have entrusted his church to Peter without love being involved? Is this quality important in leaders in the Church today?

me?" How often have teenagers, sometimes eager to profess their love, been found to ask whether they are loved. To ask it. Has one ever asked a friend as much? A brother or sister?

I could think of scores of questions Christ might have put to Peter. Do you promise never to betray me again? Will you finally be more modest in your claims? Do you now, at long last, after having denied me, amend your life? Will you please modulate your vaunted professions of faith? Now do you see why I had to wash your feet? Well, big-mouth?

But none of this. This God-made-flesh is interested in one thing, the heart and face of the one before him. The gift of a person, even tarnished, so like unto glory it was the only image of God that God allowed. The human "yes." The affirmation, uttered in all its hurt and frailty. The turning of the spirit that won back God's very heart to the Israelites time and time again. The movement of will that quickened Mary's fiat. The surge of hope that rises with every human longing.

Jesus said only, "Do you love me?"

What manner of God is this that we worship? What wondrous love has become incarnate to live and die in Jesus Christ? What splendid manner of man was he? How could we not "glory" in such a God?

The Book of Revelation chants, "Worthy is the Lamb.... To the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, be praise and honor, glory and might, forever and ever."

It turned out just as Jesus said. Peter became the kind of man who learned to glorify such a God even in his death