

- St. Francis de Sales said, *“God ... gives us all we need to achieve salvation. So we are not to stop at merely desiring salvation, but . . . must actually take the steps.”*
- Who will show us the steps? Peter. He went through a spiritual death and resurrection.
- Here are the five steps down into the tomb and the five steps up into resurrected life.
- **(1) We stop praying** – The night he was arrested, the Lord told Peter, James, and John to watch and pray, but they did not watch, they slept.
- Jesus asked Peter, *“Could you not watch one hour with me?”*
- If we do not consistently pray to God each day of our lives, we will gradually grow lukewarm in our relationship.
- **(2) We replace prayer with action** – When Peter gave up prayer he substituted it for action.
- Since he failed to pray before Jesus’ arrest, he felt compelled to act.
- So he swung his sword and cut off the ear of a slave and was scolded by Jesus.
- *“Prayer,”* not action, according to St. Padre Pio, *“is the best weapon we possess, [it is] the key that opens the heart of God.”*
- **(3) We lose focus** – When Peter stepped outside the boat he sank because he stopped looking at Jesus and focused on the strength of the storm.
- It’s ironic that our Lord changed Simon’s name to Peter, meaning rock, because he was more of a reed in the wind.
- We lose focus because we are scared; scared that if we concentrate on Christ, we will have to change.
- Don’t be distracted by the stormy waters in life, focus on Christ walking above them.
- **(4) We like creature comforts** – When Jesus was called before Caiaphas, Peter tagged along.
- When Jesus was falsely accused of blasphemy, Peter was warming himself by the fire.
- He should have worried more about the cold stares and bitter accusations that Jesus faced alone.
- This world is attractive, but our Lenten practices teach us to detach ourselves from the world below and attach ourselves to God above.
- **(5) We get angry** – As Peter warmed himself by the fire, three girls came up and asked him if he was with Jesus.
- Peter denied it three times and cursed and swore: *“I don’t know the man!”*
- When we withdraw from God we get bitter, angry, and lash out at God and at his Church.
- *“Why does the Church have such convoluted rules, who do they think they are?”*
- When asked if they still believe in Christ they reply, *“I don’t know the man. Leave me alone!”*
- This is rock bottom, this is spiritual death, but the Good News of Easter is that there is a way back, and again Peter shows us the steps to Spiritual Resurrection.

- **(1) Something external happens** – For Peter it was the cock crowing twice.
  - For us, we may be moved by a pandemic, the intercession of a friend, illness, or loss.
  - Something external happens that reminds us how disillusioned and distanced we have become.
  - **(2) The eyes of Christ** – When the Lord approached Peter after his trial, Peter turned away from him out of shame.
  - Yet when Jesus passed by, the eyes of a condemned and broken man who took all our sins upon his shoulders gazed into the depths of Peter's soul.
  - Then Peter remembered how he had boasted at the Last Supper that even if everyone should abandon Jesus, he would be true.
  - When God looks into the depths of our soul, light has already found its way back in.
  - **(3) Contrition** – Peter remembered what Jesus had told him about the three-fold denial and he broke down and wept.
  - Contrition brings us home again because we realize God wants to forgive us before we want to be forgiven.
  - Pope Francis said God never grows tired of forgiving us, we get tired of asking for forgiveness.
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- **(4) Close the gap** – A week after Easter the Apostles returned to fishing because they were not yet convinced.
  - Jesus asked, *"Have you caught anything."* John yelled, *"It is the Lord!"*
  - Then Peter jumped into the water and swam towards the shore.
  - When we realize Jesus is over there, close the gap immediately and run forth to meet the Lord.
  - **(5) Unconditional love** – Jesus asked Peter three times, *"Do you love me?"*
  - The true meaning is lost in translation from Greek into English.
  - The first two times, Jesus asked Peter to love him with an *Agape* or unconditional godly love.
  - Peter replied with the lower love: *Philos* or friendship.
  - The third time Jesus dropped down to Peter's level of *Philos* or friendship love.
  - Peter answered yes and was resurrected.
  - Jesus knew that later in life Peter would go to the cross also, and his love for Christ would finally become unconditional and godly.
  - What's the Good News of Easter?
  - Christ has died and Christ has risen ... and so can we.
  - For Pope Francis said, *"It is encouraging to know that [Jesus] walks ahead of us in life and in death. [...] He plants in our hearts the conviction that God is able to make everything work unto good, because even from the grave He brings life."*