

We can say the best things, and we can say the worst things, and we don't know the difference. This is because we have an extraordinary confidence in ourselves and our way of seeing, which is not very well-founded.

I believe the experience of learning to be always slightly painful, because we always have to take down our previous ideas and rebuild our views. When we learn something really important, it sometimes involves a disastrous toppling earthquake of change, which is one of the most painful experiences life can throw at us. When you learn something, you always feel as if you've lost something. In fact you have gone a little further towards the truth.

In a single lifetime we can only partially learn the truth; we find the things people said in the twelfth century occasionally ridiculous, sometimes off-kilter, and always short of the many things we know that they didn't. And our cleverest statements will look the same to people in future generations, if there are any. We are pilgrims, and far short of having arrived.

Saint Peter is our patron saint in this pilgrim condition. When he blurts out a truth about Jesus which the others may not even dare to think, he is showered with beatitudes by his Master. Note what Jesus says: *It was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.* When Matthew began his Gospel, he gave a long list of flesh and blood, which might have been used to say who Jesus was, to answer his question to the disciples. But Joseph knew that this long genealogy of names didn't really explain Jesus, because he knew Jesus was not his son according to flesh and blood.

Indeed, Jesus would have been nobody's son if Joseph had done what he, as a flesh-and blood human being, "a good man", wanted to do, and divorced Mary. Instead he is taught what to do by an angel in a dream: he had an experience, that is, of a messenger from God, "according to the Spirit"; and in that realm of spiritual truth he was inspired to make a gift to the unborn Jesus of his own family name and descent; it was Joseph, greeted as "Son of David", who makes Jesus "Son of David" and heir of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Peter manages to say of Jesus what only the Holy Spirit could make him say. But he should not get over-confident. When Jesus for the first time mentions the Cross, Peter, now revealed as an inspired authority on Jesus, tries to change his course, and is greeted with the fiercest rebuke Jesus ever administers; *get behind me, Satan, stumbling-block in my path!*

Lord, never let us cease to be disciples, learners and pilgrims, always ready to change our mind and our way as you teach us the truth.