



Detail of a 6th c icon of St Peter from Mt Sinai
Published through the Courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to
the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai.

The name "Peter" is the English version of the Latin translation of the Aramaic/Greek
word Cephas, meaning rock.

Matthew 16

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

As it is here in v16 he is most frequently referred to as "Simon Peter" in the Gospels, all of which describe him as being a fisherman.

Matthew 4

18 As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

This is represented in one of the panels from Duccio's huge altarpiece for Siena Cathedral (1308-11) and this passage also underlies the imagery of the mosaic by Anne Graham on our southern wall.



Evidently Peter was married, for all three Synoptic Gospels refer to Jesus' healing the disciple's mother-in-law who was suffering from a fever. (Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, and Luke 4:38-39).

Matthew specifically refers to Jesus touching her hand, and the mosaic below from the Cathedral of the Assumption, Monreale, Sicily (12th-13th century) conveys the incipient touch powerfully.



While Peter plays a prominent role in the Gospels we are made fully aware that his faith, boldly expressed in the passage from Matthew Ch 16 above, is still far from rock-like, and, like the other disciples, he struggles to understand Jesus.

Nowhere is this ambivalence more dramatically expressed than in the episode recorded in **Matthew 14**

25 And early in the morning Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." 28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus.

30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

This is also represented in the Monreale mosaics and much more recently by Ivan Aivazovsky (1888)



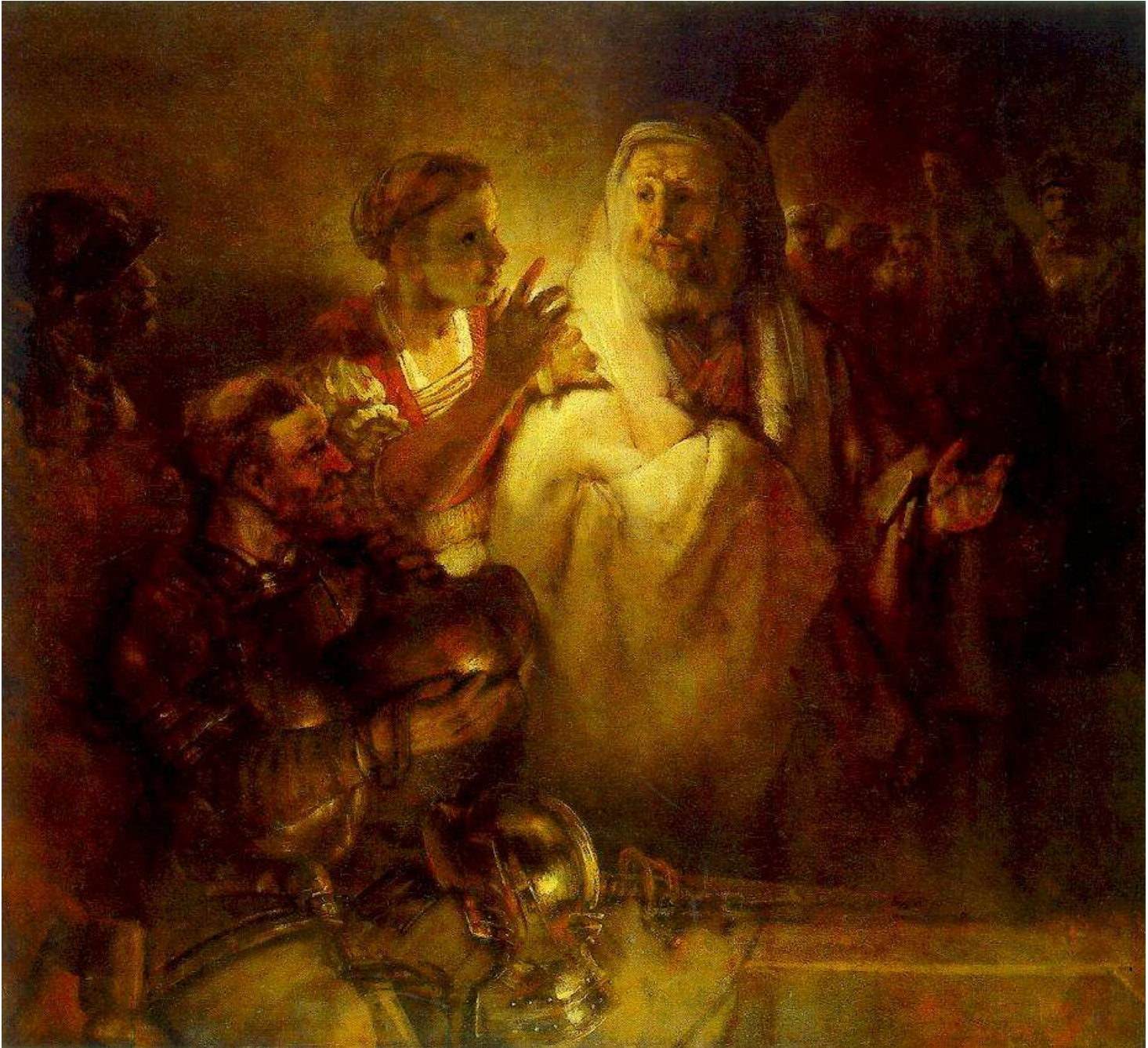
When, at the Last Supper, Jesus predicts that Peter, who had protested at the Lord's washing his feet, would in fact deny that he even knew Him, the scene is set for the accounts of the denials in all four Gospels. (Matthew 26:33-35, Mark 14:29-31, Luke 22:33-34 and John 13:36-38). Interestingly, this scene was represented by artists from very early on, as in the great mosaic images of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (6th c)



and continued to be popular for hundreds of years. Some of the most powerful versions are those by 17th c artists, who skillfully play on the contrast between darkness and light.



The Denial of St Peter by Gerard van Honthorst (1622-1624)



If we look closely at Rembrandt's painting, (around 1660) we can glimpse Jesus in the background, gazing toward Peter.

Bp Lancelot Andrewes composed this prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, look upon us with those eyes of thine where-with thou didst look upon Peter in the hall; that with Peter we may repent and, by the same love be forgiven; for thine endless mercy's sake. Amen