

A New Vision

Father Peter believed in visions, but he assumed they came to special people, and seldom to workaday parish priests. So much more than his surprise when one came his way. He had been St. Philip's parish priest for many years. During that time he had known many glorious days, especially the great festivals, when the church had resounded with God's praise. There had been times of fellowship and meaningful ministry when he knew for sure that he was in the place where God wanted him to be. Yet there had also been times of doubt and questions when he wondered if his gospel words had really been understood by his people, and if another could minister to their needs better than himself.

This morning, when he had celebrated the Thursday service of Holy Communion alone, was one of those down days. Surely someone could have been observant enough to ensure at least a congregation of one.



Peter was about to leave when he felt compelled to kneel in a pew near the front of the church where his people could have been. With growing sorrow and compassion he prayed for his people, for their community, for personal guidance. In a while there were no more words to pray and he stayed kneeling, still conscious of the quietness. Traffic sounds barely penetrated the thick stone walls and great oak doors of this holy place.

Then to his astonishment, he found himself standing before the altar, staring at the cross. Mrs. Mitchell must have given it a special polishing. He had not noticed it so bright when he stood there just a little while ago. The cross shone brighter and brighter until it became an intense white light, too glaring to look into. Peter was turning his head away when the light changed. It broadened out at the edges to give the appearance of a human form. His heart pounded. He was sure. Yes it had to be. It was the Lord!

He was too stunned to move until he felt a hand on his shoulder, gently but forcefully pushing him to his knees. Then, still on his knees he felt the hand turning him into the aisle. Someone had opened the west doors. Sunlight and the hubbub of the town burst in together. The hand was pushing him forward. Peter crawled on his knees the whole length of the church until in the doorway he felt the pressure of the Lord's hand released. Only for a moment. This time the hand was under his arm, helping him to stand. He could not bring himself to look to his side, but still conscious of the presence, he knew the Lord was making him look out on the town.

Now he knew his thoughts were being guided. He looked at the streets where he and his people went about their lives as followers of Jesus. He recalled the homes he had entered at the most important times in people's lives; the children he had baptised; the couples he had joined in marriage; the families he had comforted and befriended. Not many of them came to his church, but they were glad it was there, and he had gone to them as their friend in the name of Jesus. He had faithfully gone about the work of God's Kingdom and for the rest he must leave it in God's hands.

The vision went as quickly as it had come. Peter knew it was a vision when, conscious that he was still kneeling in the pew, he opened his eyes. Turning his head, he saw the doors were firmly closed. He waited a moment feeling that to hurry would be indecorous. but then rose and walked through the church. He flung open the doors to stand in the place of his vision. A joyous freedom overwhelmed him as though some closed doors in his own being had burst apart. *This is my parish. This is my work. This is what God has called me to do.*

Peter had had a vision. Now he had a *new vision* - a vision of God's Kingdom unfolding all around him.