I have never been much into magic shows, which I am sure is information that will make all of you sleep better at night. But besides wanting to put your mind at ease, I do have another reason for bringing this up and that has to do with one of the chief tools used by magicians. I don’t mean the Aztec Tomb that G.O.B. Bluth popularized on *Arrested Development* but rather am talking about the concept of misdirection. Misdirection is when magicians deliberately draw the audience’s attention to one thing so as to distract them from the rather pedestrian part of the trick that will, in a moment, appear magical. In other words, the audience does not see the magician pulling cards out of their pants because they are busy watching the magic handkerchief. But it is not just the audiences of magic shows who are susceptible to misdirection, something like this can also occur in life. It is often not deliberate as it is with magicians, but still misdirection makes us miss something important because our attention is drawn elsewhere. And in life such misdirection can be a problem because sometimes the quieter and less noticeable thing may actually be more important than the boisterous item. Take for example today’s Gospel. The big item is the quite literal boatload of fish that Simon, James and John haul in, but there is a less noticed part. It is a very small scene that takes place between Peter and Jesus which reads, “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’" It seems like a very strange reaction. I mean how does Peter, upon seeing a plethora of fish, decide to immediately think of his own sinfulness? I don’t think I have ever had this reaction at the seafood counter at Sentry, telling the fishmonger to go away and not look upon my decrepit soul. So we need to ask why this was this the reaction of Peter? What was it that he learned in the miraculous catch of fish that made him look inside himself and feel unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus?

To start with I think we need to reflect a little on Peter and his personality. As we all know Peter could be brash and impetuous. He cut off the ear of one of the men who came to arrest Jesus and he also denied knowing Jesus three times. But there was also something deeply perceptive about Peter. For all of his fumbling and rashness he often understood things before everyone else. When Jesus asks the disciples who he is, while the other disciples sound like they are trying to give a book report on a book they have not read, it is Peter who says, “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.” And so, it would seem wholly consistent with Peter’s personality that at this moment, very early in the ministry of Jesus, he understands something quite profound. In the moment where their nets are overflowing and their boats are beginning to sink from the weight of the fish, Peter is not distracted. He realizes that it is not about the fish. He realizes that Jesus is not just a guy who knows where the fish are biting, but is something much more. That is the reason he pivots so quickly from talking about fishing conditions to calling Jesus Lord and telling him to go away from him. What exactly he realizes we are not told but it is apparent from the text that Peter sees Jesus as something much greater than himself.

C.S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* says, “A man does not call a line crooked unless he had some idea of a straight line.” In many ways I think this is what happened to Peter today. He had something with which to compare. He saw something of the perfection of God and realized in an instant how far he was from that. He saw just how crooked his line was when it was compared to Jesus. But what does this have to say to us? Can we learn anything from Peter’s reaction and his confession of being a sinful man? I think we can and what we can learn has to do with something I believe we need to regain not just in Christian circles but in society at large and that is a sense of awe. Before we move on let me get all high school debate class about this and define the term. The word awe means, “an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime.” It is kind of a lot of words to throw into the blender, but I think we see all of them in Peter today – the dread, veneration and wonder. So here is what I think we can take from this: I think some of our problems today come from us setting our gaze to low. We look to the mundane and pedestrian rather than the sacred and sublime.

One of the most ignored of the Ten Commandments besides not coveting our neighbor’s donkey is the one about not taking the name of the Lord in vain. And I think part of the consequence of ignoring this commandment is that it leads to the lack of awe in our lives. Part of what we are doing when we take the name of the Lord in vain is that we are bring God down to us. We are reducing God’s majesty by using him as an expression to explain our feelings when we accidently drop a tub of Cool Whip. But if we make God mundane and ordinary then there is really no need for God to exist. If God is just another crooked line like the rest of us, we will never realize where we fall short and where we should go. In Immanuel Kant’s work, *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* (*Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* for you German speakers out there) he has a rather remarkable observation about God. He basically says that if God appears to you, you can’t just take God’s word for it. You have to judge this being who is appearing to you and then decide whether or not it is actually God. And the way you do this, according to Kant, is by evaluating whether or not this being possesses three characteristics which are: perfect reason, perfect freedom and adherence to the categorical imperative. Regardless of the criteria what I find remarkable is the fact that Kant feels God needs to justify himself to Kant. It takes a fair amount of chutzpah to appoint yourself the position of telling God whether or not he is God. In Kant’s view, we get to shine a flashlight on God and determine if he is up to snuff. But that is not what seems to happen when there is an actual encounter with God. What we hear from Peter today in his encounter with Jesus is that the flashlight points in a different direction. God’s glory shows us how far we have to go. It shows us that we are sinful. But this does not have to be depressing news. Think of it like a map at the start of a journey. How many people like to take a trip with no idea of where they are going? When we have awe and reverence for God we see where we are going on the journey. Peter today saw not just how crooked his line was, but he also saw what a straight line looked like. If we get like Kant and forget the awe and wonder we will continue to stumble around and grope in the dark not knowing where we are going. We will continue to make God something small and dull and under our judgement. We will continue to look at the boatload of fish and miss the Son of God who is standing right in front of us. The world is full of misdirection. It is full of distractions and dead-end paths, but we are called to lift our gaze higher so that we may see God’s glory, this day and forevermore.