

8. Peter and the Eleven

When the Holy Spirit came down upon the Apostles at Pentecost they preached fearlessly under the lead of St. Peter to the great crowds gathered in Jerusalem. We are told: "Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them." There stood the official teaching and governing body of the Church—Peter and the Eleven.

The fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells how later the same governing body, grown somewhat, met in Jerusalem to discuss and make laws concerning certain problems which had arisen in the Church. Then "Peter and the Eleven" were surrounded by "The Elders," that is, men who had been appointed and consecrated by the Apostles to help them in their work.

It was the same governing body, now very much grown, which met in Rome on October 11th, 1962, for the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the twenty-first General Council of the Catholic Church. Then the late Pope John XXIII presided over more than two thousand five hundred bishops from all parts of the world. Both meetings, in Jerusalem and in Rome, were for the same purpose, to clarify the teaching of Christ and adapt the worship and discipline of the Church to meet the needs of the times.

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Peter Head of the Apostle

Christ is the head of the Church. But it is clear from the New Testament that he appointed St. Peter to be his vicar to act for him as head of the Church on earth. At his first meeting with St. Peter, or Simon as he was then called, Jesus gave him a new name to indicate the special position he was to have (John 1, 42). He said: "So you are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter English form of the Greek word for Rock).

Peter is always mentioned first in the lists of the Apostles. His name occurs 195 times in the New Testament. Next in prominence to him comes St. John, called the "beloved disciple," and his name occurs only 29 times. It is necessary to mention here only the three famous occasions when Christ told St. Peter that he was to be the head of the Church on earth.

The First Promise

The first is in the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Christ and the Apostles were near the town of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked the Apostles: "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" They told him: "Some say John the Baptist, others one of the prophets returned from the dead." He said:

"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter, speaking on behalf of them all, replied: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus, as was so often the case in his more important sayings, replied in a Hebrew form of prose-poetry, in three verses of three lines each:

**"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! (i.e., Son of John)
For flesh and blood have not revealed this to you,
but my Father who is in heaven.**

**And I tell you, you are Peter,
and on this rock I will build my Church,
and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.**

**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven,
and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever
you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". (Matt. 16, 17-19).**

A rock is an obvious symbol of strength and endurance. In another place Christ spoke of the wisdom of the man who builds his house on a rock, so that when win, rain and floods come, it stands firm. Psalm 18 calls Almighty God the Rock, the foundation on which the people of Israel were based. St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians says Christ is the Rock. Now St. Peter is told that he is to be the Rock in the place of Christ. Because of him "the powers of death" will not overcome the Church, that is, it will not die.

Keeper of the Keys

The words "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" mean that St. Peter is to have authority over the Church. The key-bearer has the power to open and shut, to admit people and keep them out. This power belongs to Christ. In the book of *Revelation* he is represented as saying: "I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev. 1, 18) and an angel describes him as "He who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens" (rev. 3, 7). He now hands his keys over to St. Peter to act on his behalf on earth.

Finally, he promises to give him the power to "Bind and loose." This, in the language of that day, meant the power to make laws, in other words, to have authority.

The Second Promise

This is found in the twenty-second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. At the Last Supper Christ said to Simon Peter:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22, 31-32).

This translation does not bring out the full meaning of the Greek words. They make a distinction between St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles. Christ said, “Satan demanded to have *you*,” in the plural, referring to all the Apostles. He added: “But I have prayed for *thee*, that *thy* faith may not fail, and when *thou* hast turned again strengthen *thy* brethren.” The singular form of the pronoun refers to St. Peter alone.

Satan would try to separate the members of the Church from each other as a man separates wheat from chaff when he sifts them. But try as he might, he would never succeed. St. Peter and his successors would always hold them together.

The Appointment

The actual appointment of St. Peter as head of the Church took place after the resurrection. At the Last Supper Christ had warned him that he would deny his master three times before cock-crow next morning. During the trial before the court of the High Priest, St. Peter waited in the courtyard. Three times bystanders accused him of being a follower of Christ, and three times he denied it. The crowing of the cock at the third denial reminded him of the warning of his master, and going out he wept bitterly.

The last chapter of St. John’s Gospel tells us how Christ, after his resurrection, met the Apostles as they returned from fishing at night on the sea of Galilee. He called to them from the shore, telling them to drop their net on the right side of the boat. They did, and caught a great catch of fish. Then St. John realized who it was and said: “It is the Lord.” St. Peter leapt out of the boat and waded ashore. The rest followed in the boat. Jesus, probably to put them at their ease and show that he was not a ghost, ate with them a meal of bread and roasted fish. And we are told:

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ A second time he said to him, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’

“He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ And

he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep'' (John 21, 15-17).

Peter had denied his master three times. Three times he must say firmly that he loved him. Three times Jesus told him to be the shepherd of the flock, that is, the head of the Church on earth.

Like the metaphors of the "rock" and the "keys," this metaphor of the "shepherd" has deep meaning. In the twenty-third psalm and many other places in the Old Testament, Almighty God is called "The Shepherd." Jesus also calls himself "the good Shepherd." Now he tells St. Peter that he is to act in his place as the shepherd.

Peter in the Acts of the Apostles

The first fifteen chapters of the Acts of the Apostles show how St. Peter stood out as the head of the Church from the very beginning, and how the Apostles, disciples and new converts accepted him as such.

In the first chapter we are told how he called for the election of a successor of Judas; in the second, how he led the Apostles in their first public preaching at Pentecost; in the third, how he worked the first miracle in the name of Christ; in the fourth, how he was arrested as the ringleader of the Christians; in the fifth, how he condemned two people who tried to deceive the Church and how they were punished by God. He received into the Church the first Gentile converts, namely Cornelius the Centurion and his household. When he was questioned about this by some of the disciples, he told how he had been instructed by God to do it, and they were satisfied. However, many Jewish Christians thought the Gentile members of the Church ought to be circumcised and obliged to keep all the laws of the Jewish religion. At a council in Jerusalem, presided over by St. James, the bishop of that city, St. Peter stood up and spoke with authority against this, and the matter was settled. St. James moved that St. Peter's lead should be followed. The Apostles under St. Peter, like the bishops of the Second Vatican Council under Pope Paul VI, made decisions on Christian practice, and all parts of the Church obeyed them.

St. Peter in Rome

St. Peter in his first letter says that he is writing from "Babylon." This was the accepted name among the first Christians for the wicked pagan city of Rome, as we know from the book of Revelation.

The fact that St. Peter was in Rome is confirmed by history and by archaeology. The tradition is that he lived in Antioch for a time, where there was a large Christian community. It was realized, however, that his place was in Rome,

which was the center of the Empire, the hub of trade, civil administration and the Roman army. All routes by land and sea led to Rome. Along those routes the Gospel could be carried over the world. This was the place for the head of a Church which was to be world-wide. He went there, was put to death for his faith there, and buried in a cemetery on a hill called Vatican. The early Christians marked his grave with a memorial.

The first Christian Emperor, Constantine, who died in 337, leveled off the top of the hill in a wonderful feat of engineering for those days, in order to build a church with the high altar exactly over this memorial. This first church was destroyed and others built over its ruins. Between the years 1940 and 1949 archaeologists made diggings under the high altar of the present basilica of St. Peter's on the Vatican and found the memorial, exactly underneath the present high altar. Around it, pointing towards it, were tombs of early Christians. Scratched on the rock were prayers asking for St. Peter's help.

Scores of early Christian writings, statues, place-names and inscriptions show that St. Peter left a firm impression on the Rome of the first century. No historian of repute now denies that he was martyred and buried there. All this strengthens the conviction always held by the Church that he was the bishop of Rome, was put to death there, and was buried on the Vatican hill. Now over his tomb stands the beautiful basilica of St. Peter, the largest Christian church in the world.

The Successors of St. Peter

Christ knew that St. Peter would die. In fact he foretold the nature of his end, namely, that he would have his hands bound and that he would be taken forcibly to his death. Yet he said he would be the Rock because of which the Church would not fall.

The Church needed a visible head in the days of the Apostles. It always needs it. As each pope dies, the leaders of the Church elect his successor. They are guided by the Holy Spirit, but use their own judgment and choose freely. Christ accepts the man of their choice and gives him authority to act in his name as head of the Church on earth.

The immediate successors of St. Peter were popes

Linus, Cletus and Clement, the last of whom died just before the end of the first century. We have the names of all the popes from St. Peter to the present pope. Once or twice in the long history of the Church men have claimed to be popes who had no right to the title. Indeed there was a short period when there were three claimants and there was uncertainty in the Church as to who was the rightful pope. But in fact only one of them was truly pope. No matter how many

claimants there might be, there can only be one true pope. Christ has kept his promise. His Church stands firm upon the rock of the papacy.

The Apostles

At the first Pentecost "Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them" (Acts 2, 14). As the eleven other Apostles were associated with Peter in teaching and governing the Church in the beginning, so the bishops of the Catholic Church are associated with the Pope.

Jesus gave the other Apostles authority to teach and to rule, using some of the words he had addressed to St. Peter: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18, 18).

He who had "all authority in heaven and on earth" sent them out to teach with his authority. He promised: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Like the rest of the Church they had to be established on the Rock, that is, remain in union with St. Peter and his successors. But they were given authority directly by Christ.

The Bishops

The Bishops of the Catholic Church are the successors of the Apostles and have from Christ authority to teach and rule in his name. He knew the Apostles would die, as he knew Peter would. He knew that there would be need of rulers like them in every century, as there was in the first.

The Apostles appointed men to help them and imposed hands upon their heads, as a sign that they were given power and authority to act in the name of Christ. For example, St. Paul imposed hands on Timothy in one place and on Titus in another, and told them to do likewise with men of their own choice. So authority has been handed on in the Church ever since.

These spiritual leaders are called Bishops. Their authority to teach Christian faith and morality comes to them directly from Christ himself. But they must exercise that teaching authority in union with their leader, the Pope, just as the Apostles exercised their teaching authority in union with Peter. If a bishop were to cut himself off from union with the Pope he would no longer have any authority from Christ to teach Christianity.

Various methods have been used throughout the history of the Church in the selection of men to be appointed bishops. Christ did not specify any particular method. In modern times it is customary for some representatives of the Pope to consult the priests and the well informed lay people of a diocese or region when

selecting a new bishop. Often the priests and others are asked to nominate the person they consider suitable for the appointment. When the selection is made the Pope as the final authority appoints him.

The Pope and the Bishops

St. Peter had the final say among the Apostles in handing on the teachings of Christ. So does the Pope among the bishops. They listen to him with reverence, because they know that in matters of faith and morality he is guided in a unique way by the Holy Spirit. It is possible for an individual bishop to make a mistake in teaching a matter of faith or morality to his people, but the Holy Spirit does not allow the Pope to lead the Church into error in similar matters. This is the full extent of what we mean by the **infallibility of the Pope**. It places him in a unique position among the bishops, making him the final court of appeal in matters of faith and morality, but it does not mean that he can do no wrong. He has no guarantee of infallibility in administrative and ceremonial matters. Like all men he is capable of making mistakes or unwise decisions in the day-to-day administration of the Church. History proves that popes have done so in the past.

The Renewal

The Pope and the bishops in consultation revise and update the administrative and liturgical structures of the Church from time to time to adapt them to our ever-changing world and to correct previous mistakes. Much publicity is given nowadays to revisions and changes of this kind which were made by the Pope and the bishops at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). They introduced a strong trend towards greater decentralization in the administrative and ceremonial aspects of the Church. This will enable the Christian community in each region or country to develop more in accordance with its own culture and traditions, but it in no way compromises the Pope's unique position as teacher of doctrines of faith and morality for the whole Church.

Guaranteed by Christ

Christ guaranteed that his Church would last until the end of time as the custodian and teacher of divine truth (Matt. 28, 19-20; John 14, 16 and 26; Matt. 16, 18). He appointed Peter to the position of earthly head, final court of appeal, within his Church (Luke 22, 31-32; Matt. 16, 13-19; John 21, 15-17). It is unthinkable that Christ would be unfaithful to his own guarantee. We can therefore be absolutely certain that the Church still has that same guarantee of inerrancy as the custodian and teacher of divine truth. The voice of Peter still exists within the Church on earth. It is the voice of the Pope speaking as head of the whole college of Bishops.

Priests

The Church in the days of the Apostles spread rapidly and it became necessary for the bishops to have men to assist them in the work of preaching and bringing the life of Christ to men. St. Paul instructed the men on whom he imposed hands to do the same with others. So priests were ordained to help the bishops. They were given power and authority to preach the word of God, to offer the sacrifice of the Mass and to administer the sacraments on behalf of the bishops.

The People of God

We sometimes call the Church the "People of God".

If we explain this name, it can show us more clearly what the Catholic Church really is. To understand it, we need to look back to the time when God made the Jewish people his own people. He gave them his message of love and they were to tell others about the one true God. They were also to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah or the Christ. Jesus was the Messiah. He came to bring god's plan for all men into its final stage of development. The main body of the Jews did not recognize him as the Messiah. As a result of this rejection, Jesus founded the new People of God, or the Church as we call it. This was to draw on all nations, classes and colours for its members. There was nothing nationalistic about it. All who find faith in Christ can become members and receive God's gifts.

The Church then, is made up of many millions of ordinary people as well as priests and bishops and the Pope of whom we have already spoken. They are all part of the People of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in all of them. They all have some part to play in the Church's mission of bringing salvation to the whole world. The Pope and bishops must listen to their views and consider them carefully. They must consult the lay people regularly, not as one consults and adviser because the laity are not part of the teaching authority set up by Christ within the Church, but as one consults a barometer, to see what new problems Christians are experiencing and what solutions the Holy Spirit may be fostering within the whole people.

By their baptism, the members of the Church are united in one mystical body with Christ, as we explained in the previous lesson. This gives them a real share in the life and work of the Church, in its public worship and in its mandate to bring the Christian message to the world.

The Second Vatican Council says:

"The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth. Thus, every layman by virtue of the very

gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission Church". (Ch. 33).

Missionary Works

God did not call men to share his life as completely isolated individuals. He willed to mould them all into a united people. In order to do so, he intervened in human history in quite a definite way. He sent his Son in human form to us as genuine Mediator between himself and us. This was the Incarnation. Through his death and resurrection, the Incarnate Son of God won salvation for all who would receive him.

Before the Son of God went up to heaven, he commissioned his Church to bring that gift of salvation to all mankind. He sent his apostles into the world just as he, himself, had been sent by his Father, with the words:

"Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized, will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned". (Mark 16, 15-16).

Ever since then, it has been the ongoing duty of the Church to reach out to all people and bring them the teachings of Christ. This duty arises, not only from that direct commission of Christ, but also from the very fact of what a true Christian ought to be, namely, a real living part, or member, of the Mystical Body of Christ.

"Although God in ways known to himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please him (see Heb. 11, 6) yet a necessity lies upon the Church, and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the gospel. Hence missionary activity today, as always, retains its power and necessity. -----The members of the Church are impelled to carry on such missionary activity by reason of the love with which they love God and by which they desire to share with all men the spiritual goods of both this life and the life to come". (11 Vat. Council, Mission 7).

Relatively few feel called by the Holy Spirit to dedicate their lives completely to missionary work in foreign lands, as lay missionaries or nuns or brothers or priests. Yet, all are called to share in some way in the service of others by bringing a knowledge and love of Christ to them. Many find opportunities for Christian witness in their own parish, down their own street, in their place of work or recreation. There are thousands of people in Australia looking for God, searching for faith. Those to whom God has given the gift of faith have a corresponding duty in love to share it with others. St. Paul was so vividly aware of this duty that he wrote: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 9, 16).

Service of Others

It is a basic duty for every sincere Christian to witness to Christ by his or her life and work in the home, in social groups, and in professional circles. Our Christian beliefs and ideas should influence everything we say and do. People should be able to see some of the love and kindness and compassion of Christ in all his true followers.

We as Christians, must show a great loyalty to his teachings even if we live in an environment where others seem to ignore him or be unaware of what he taught. Without interfering with the legitimate freedom of others, we must use whatever influence we have to ensure that true Christian standards of conduct are respected and upheld. We must be ready to put ourselves out, and sacrifice our time and our energies, to help others in their search for Christ.

There are many voluntary groups and fellowships within the Church to help us to do that; the Christian Family Movement, the Young Christian Workers, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the legion of Mary, the Parents and Friends Associations and many others.

Popes, bishops, priests, nuns and lay people, all belong to the Body of Christ. They are his hands, his lips, his heart; the hands through which he serves the poor, the lips through which he speaks to all mankind, the heart with which he loves the whole world. Service of others must be the great rule of life for every true follower of Christ, service for Christian with Christ in a spirit of Christian love.

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It is a great privilege indeed to belong to the Body of Christ. It is Christ himself who invites people to this great honour. He says: "You did not choose me, but chose you." (John 15: 16). We do not know why he chooses some and not others. The real mystery is that he should choose anyone. We are all ungrateful sinners and none of us live up fully to the dignity of our Christian calling. Conscious of this we pray regularly in the Mass to our Father in heaven:

*"Though we are sinners,
we trust in your mercy and love.
Do not consider what we truly deserve,
but grant us your forgiveness,
Through Christ Our Lord."*

On the day of our baptism Christ called us to belong to his people. He calls people in various ways --- through parents or the example of a friend, through a T.V. programme or a course of lessons like this, through a future partner in marriage or even through a sudden illness. We can reject Christ's call because he will never force us. He invites us to join his people but we can refuse. How many reject his invitation no one will ever know.

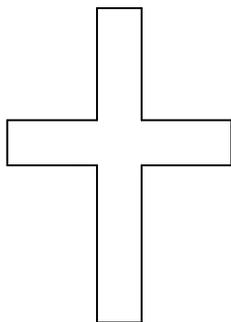
Many have found strength and hope and courage in the following prayer:
"O Great and glorious God and my Lord Jesus Christ, enlighten I beseech You, the darkness of my mind. Give me a right faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity. Grant that I may know You, O Lord, in order that I may always and in all things act according to Your most holy and perfect will. Amen."

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

If you study the lessons with a friend, or friends, a discussion of the points suggested at the end of each lesson will help you to grasp the subject more fully. Points suggested for discussion are covered in the lesson to which they refer.

Even if you study alone, an effort to think out some comments on each point will deepen your grasp of the subject. Read the lesson again if you find you cannot comment meaningfully on the points suggested. There is no need to send us your comments.

- 1. What is the significance of the new name Peter, which Jesus gave to Simon Bar-Jona?**
- 2. Read the opening chapters of the "Acts of the Apostles" and point out incidents which show Peter's special role in the early Church.**
- 3. What evidence can you recall from the Gospels to show us that Christ made Peter head of the Apostles?**
- 4. In your own words how would you explain what is meant by The infallibility of the Pope? Does his infallibility make him more holy?**
- 5. Some things in the Church can be changed; others cannot. List some of the things you think can never be changed, and give reasons why.**
- 6. List some ways in which you feel you yourself, could become a better witness to Christ in today's world.**



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