



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

THE PAPACY

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith
beholdthetruth.com



Christ and the Church Are One

- ❖ With the coming of Jesus Christ into the world the relationship between God and man has been permanently reestablished.
- ❖ This relationship is exemplified by the indivisible bond of unity between Jesus and His Church.
- ❖ Christ and the Church are one, which is why the Bible calls the Church “the body of Christ.” Rom. 12:5



The Teaching Authority of the Apostles

- ❖ Christ selected from within the Church the Twelve Apostles, conferring on them a unique share in His authority.
- ❖ He commissioned them to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Matt. 28:19-20

The Teaching Authority of the Apostles

- ❖ He assured them, “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” Luke 10:16
- ❖ We see, then, a progression of authority from the Father to the Son, and from the Son to the Apostles. Cf. John 20:21
- ❖ Christians are obligated to follow the commands of the Church’s ordained leaders, therefore, as they would the commands of Christ; or, to put it more succinctly, the commands of the Church’s leaders *are* the commands of Christ for it is He who is speaking through them.



The Magisterium

- ❖ The Catholic bishops are the successors to the Apostles.
- ❖ We call this unbroken line of bishops from the Apostles down through the centuries Apostolic Succession.
- ❖ The Apostle Paul refers to this when he writes to Saint Timothy: “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Tim. 2:1-2



The Magisterium

- ❖ As the inheritors of the Apostles' teaching authority, the body of bishops form the Church's Magisterium or "teaching office."
- ❖ The role of the Magisterium is not to invent new teachings, but rather to clarify the teachings we have received from Christ—"the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" Jude 3—and to safeguard these teachings from error.



The Bible Alone?

- ❖ Those who follow Martin Luther's teaching of the Bible alone will ask why we need an authority to safeguard God's word since it has been written down for us.
- ❖ But the rampant division among Bible-believing Christians since the advent of Luther's Bible alone doctrine, proves the necessity of the Magisterium.
- ❖ From the beginning, in fact, the true faith has been confronted by the constant threat of heresy, which has served to confound believers and cleave them from the Body of Christ.



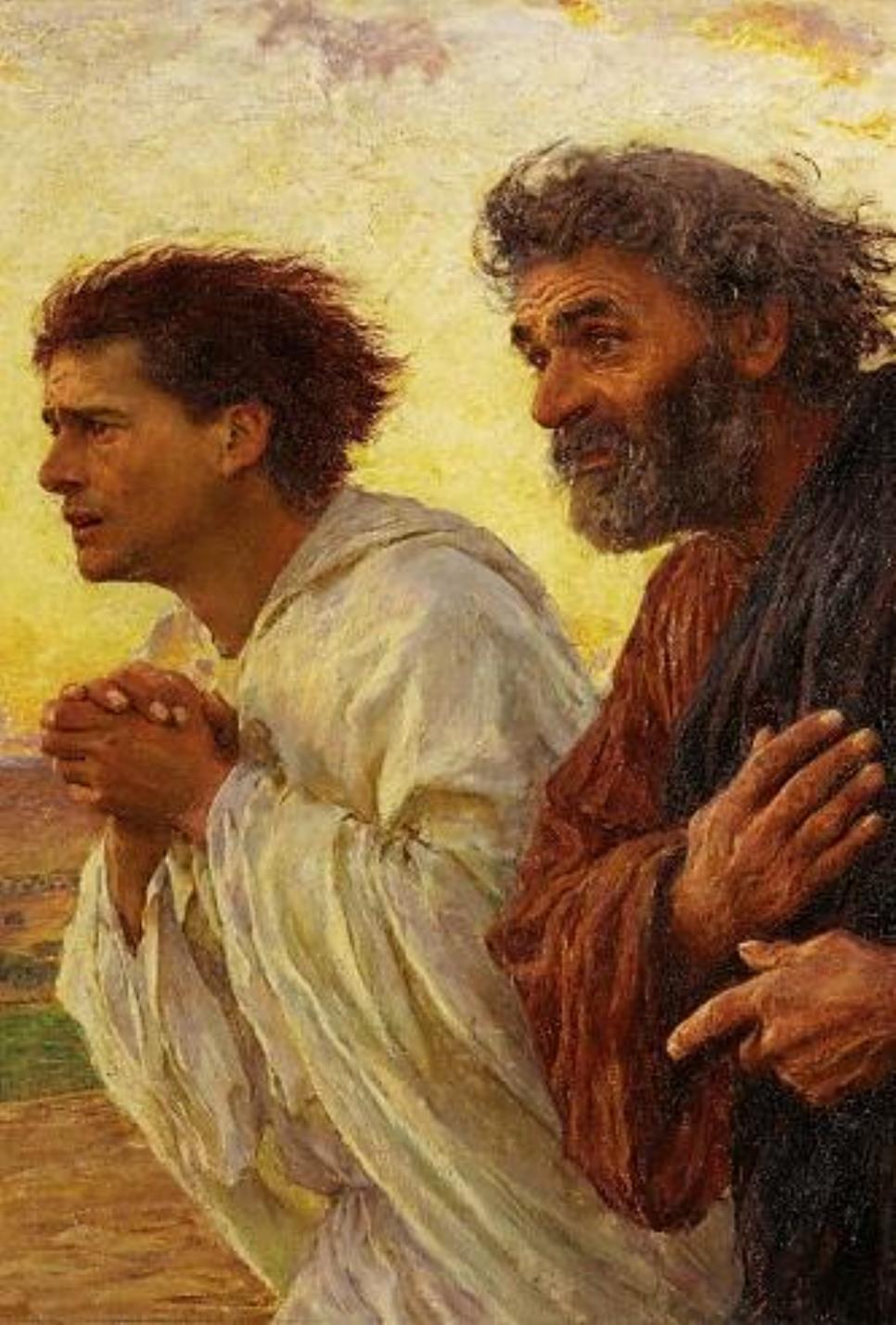
The Safeguard of Unity

- ❖ Clearly, it was necessary for the apostolic authority—that authority to clarify and safeguard the gospel from innovation and distortion—to be handed down.
- ❖ Why would Jesus give this authority only to the first generation of Church leaders after all knowing disputes threatening the integrity of His Body would recur through the centuries?



The Primacy of Peter

- ❖ Catholic tradition recognizes Simon Peter as the Prince of the Apostles.
- ❖ His name usually appears first in the list of the Apostles. Cf. Matt. 10:2, et al.
- ❖ He often speaks with the Lord on behalf of the group. Cf. John 6:67-69
- ❖ He is the only Apostle to imitate Jesus by walking on water. Matt. 14:29
- ❖ Jesus renames him Peter or “Rock,” and promises to build His Church upon him. Matt. 16:18
- ❖ At the Last Supper, Jesus warns Peter that Satan wants to destroy the Apostles, and entrusts him with the task of strengthen the faith of the others. Luke 22:31-32



The Primacy of Peter

- ❖ The angel at the empty Tomb instructs the women to speak to “[the] disciples and Peter.” Mark 16:7
- ❖ While John outruns Peter, arriving at the Tomb ahead of him, he waits to allow Peter to enter first. John 20:3-6
- ❖ After the Ascension, Peter initiates the election of Matthias to the Twelve. Acts 1:15-26
- ❖ He delivers the first sermon of the Christian era at Pentecost. Acts 2:15-36
- ❖ He addresses the Sanhedrin. Acts 4:5-12
- ❖ He baptizes the first Gentile converts. Acts 10:48
- ❖ He settles the theological dispute at the first Church council. Acts 15:6-11

Peter's Successors

- ❖ There is extensive historical evidence that Peter served as the Bishop of Rome and was martyred there along with Paul during the reign of the Emperor Nero, in about 64 A.D.
- ❖ Saint Ignatius of Antioch, for example, writing to the Roman faithful in about 107 A.D., says, “Not as Peter and Paul did, do I command you. They were Apostles, and I am a convict.”
Letter to the Romans 4:3



Chi Rho (early Christian symbol consisting of first two letters of Christ in Greek), Catacomb of Saint Callixtus in Rome, circa 200 A.D.

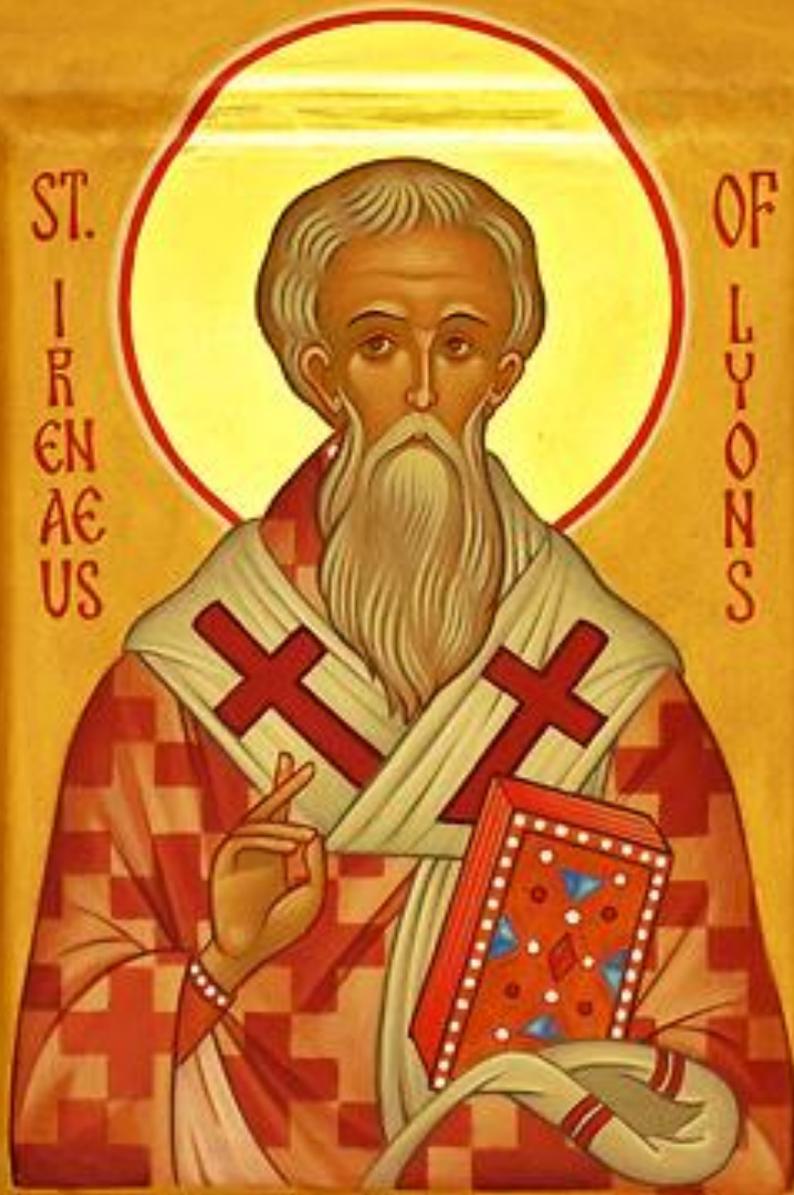
Peter's Successors

- ❖ Peter himself indicates his presence in Rome with the concluding words to his *First Letter*, saying, “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.” 5:13
- ❖ “Babylon” was commonly used by the Christians in the first century as a code name for Rome. Cf. Rev. 14:8, et al.
- ❖ “She who is at Babylon,” then, means “the Church of Rome.”
- ❖ The Early Church Fathers verify that the Mark to whom Peter refers is the Evangelist, who served as his assistant in Rome, developing his *Gospel* from his records of the Apostle’s preaching there.

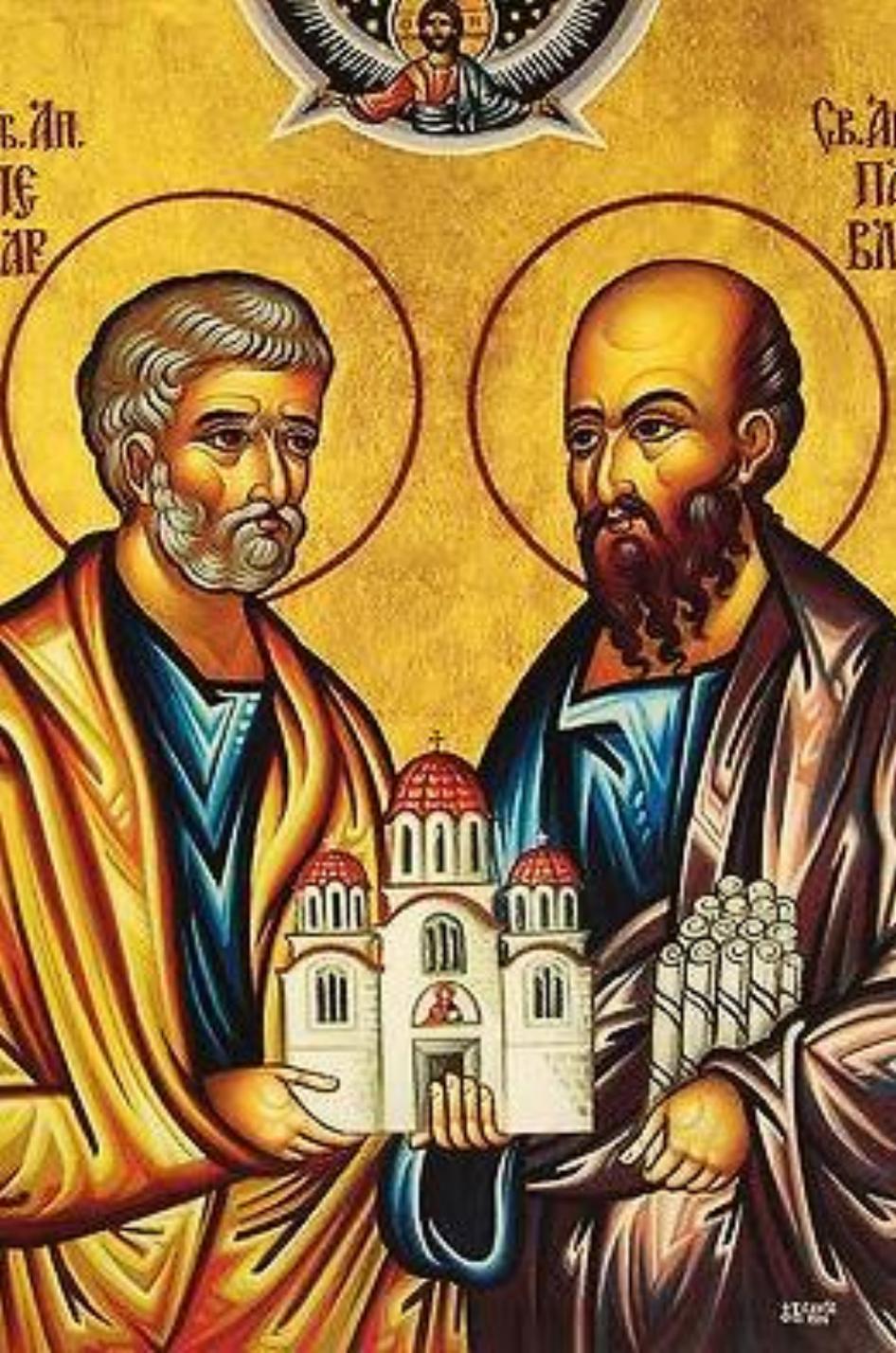


Peter's Tomb (ca. 67 A.D.), rediscovered in 1941 beneath the main altar at the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. Latin inscriptions dating from the 3rd century include Christian symbols, prayer petitions, and Peter's name repeated about 20 times.

Peter's Successors

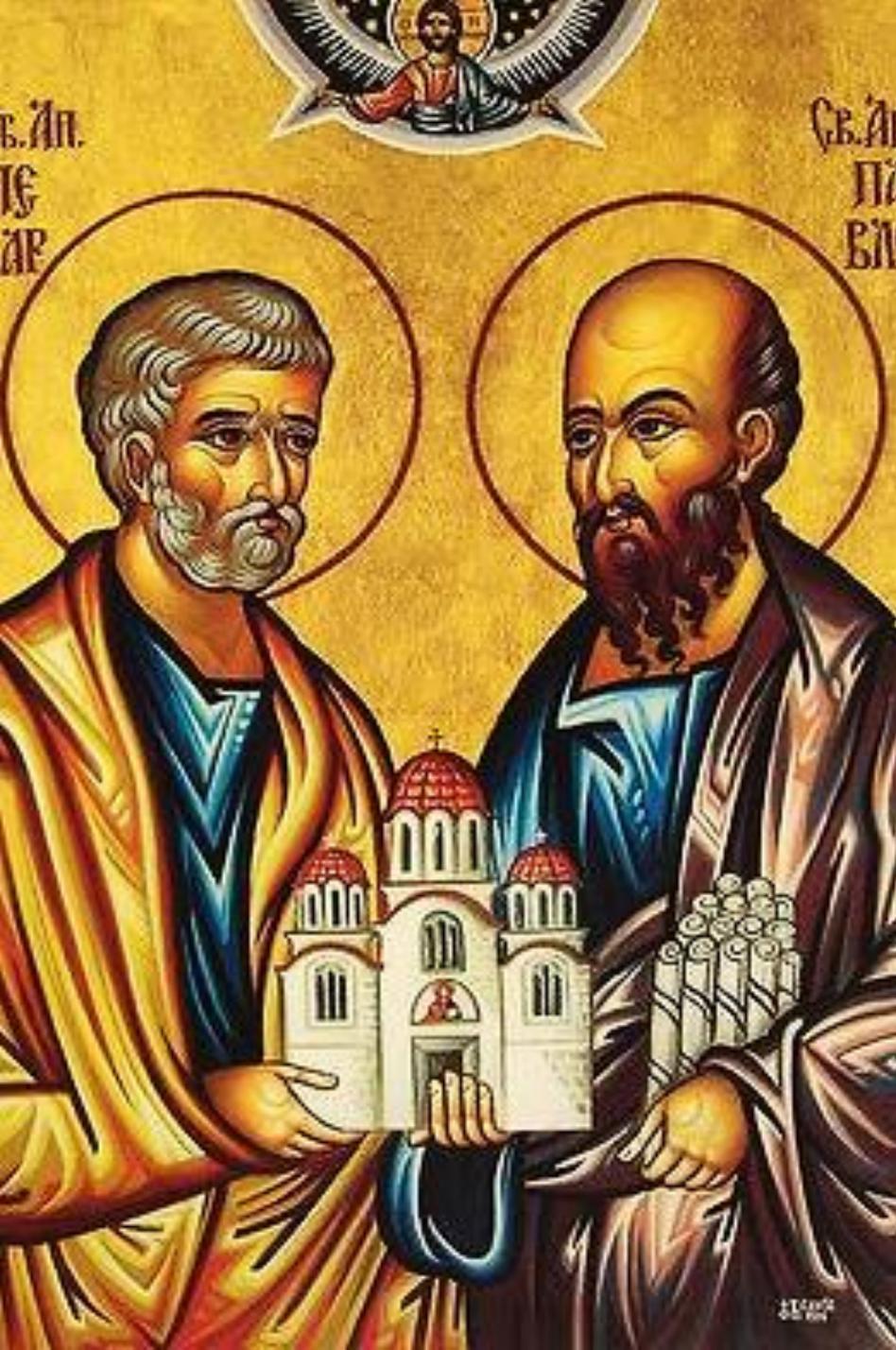


- ❖ The list of Saint Peter's successors, the Bishops of Rome, was preeminent among all the apostolic lists maintained by the ancient Christians.
- ❖ Our earliest listing of the Bishops of Rome comes from Saint Irenaeus of Lyons in about 185 A.D., whose own apostolic lineage is traceable to the Apostle John through his teacher Saint Polycarp of Smyrna.



Peter's Successors

- ❖ Irenaeus writes: “[W]e shall confound all those who ... assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the succession of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, *founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul ...*”
- ❖ Note the indication that Peter had “founded” the Church of Rome while Paul “organized” it.



Peter's Successors

- ❖ “... that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For with this Church, because of its superior origin, all Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world; and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition.” *Against Heresies* 3:3:2
- ❖ Irenaeus goes on to list the popes by name down to Saint Eleutherus in his day.



Our Father in Faith

- ❖ The title “Pope,” from the Greek, *Papa*, used universally for bishops in the early days of the faith, eventually came in the West to refer exclusively to the Bishop of Rome.
- ❖ Fundamentalists routinely condemn the Catholic practice of calling bishops and priests “Father,” citing Jesus’ command: “Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” Matt. 23:9



Our Father in Faith

- ❖ The Lord, however, is speaking here in hyperbole to underscore the fact that all life and wisdom come to us, not from human beings, but from God.
- ❖ As a matter of fact, the pious practice of calling bishops and priests “Father” started with the Apostles themselves.
- ❖ Saint Paul, for instance, writes, “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” 1 Cor. 4:15; cf. 1 Thess. 2:11



Our Father in Faith

- ❖ Jesus willed that the Apostles and their successors serve as living images of God the Father to continually remind His followers of Him.
- ❖ Hearing constantly in the Church the name “Father” helps us to become evermore acclimated to the reality of the Blessed Trinity and our sonship or daughtership in Christ.



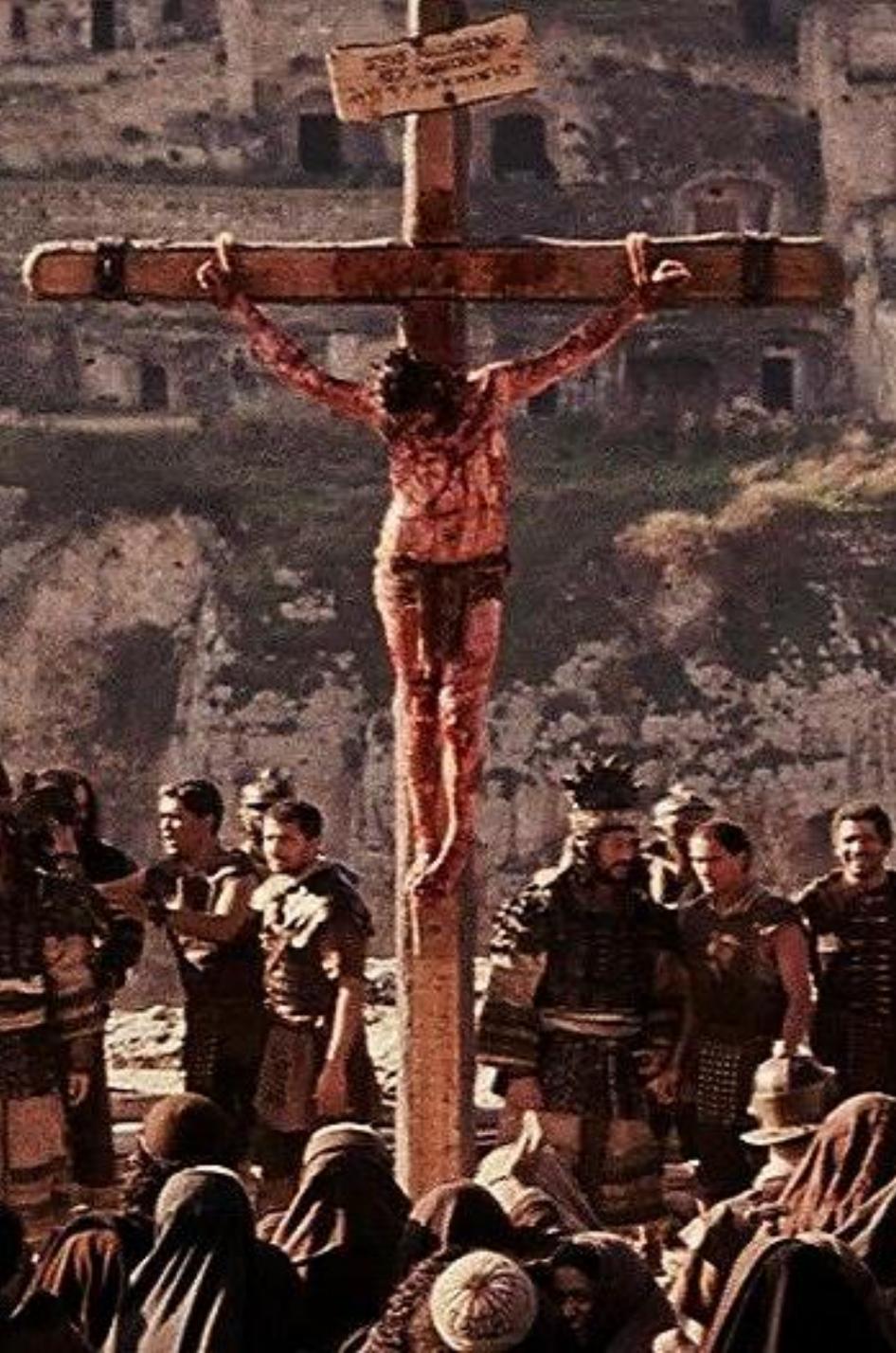
The Obedience of Faith

- ❖ We find a succession of father figures throughout salvation history—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon—leading up to Jesus, the archetypal image of the Father, and extending from Him in a subordinate way down through the era of the Church.
- ❖ Jesus is the summit and fulfillment of this long paternal line.



The Obedience of Faith

- ❖ Christ's desire to live and act in obedience to the Father's will is the unifying thread in His ministry.
- ❖ His act of perfect obedience to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane—"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as though wilt."
Matt. 16:39—undid the first Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Cf. Rom. 5:19



The Obedience of Faith

- ❖ The importance of obedience to God in our walk with Christ cannot be overstated.
- ❖ It was the refusal to obey God after all that separated us from Him in the first place.
- ❖ Christ restored our broken relationship with God by obediently accepting death on the Cross. Cf. Phil. 2:8



The Obedience of Faith

- ❖ Having redeemed us, Jesus calls us now to walk with Him in obedience on the path to heaven.
- ❖ As already indicated, obedience to God includes obedience to His Church. Cf. Luke 10:16; John 13:20, et al.
- ❖ This call to obey the Lord's subordinates is really a kind of test for us; for it requires faith and humility.



The Obedience of Faith

- ❖ Jesus' command to obey His intermediaries was not made contingent on their personal holiness.
- ❖ David remained the legitimate king of Israel despite his sins of adultery and murder.
Cf. 2 Sam. 11:1ff.
- ❖ Of the Twelve Apostles, handpicked by Christ Himself, one sold Him out for thirty pieces of silver, all but one abandoned Him in His hour of greatest need, and Peter denied knowing Him. Cf. Matt. 26:20ff.

The Seat of Authority

- ❖ Jesus cautions against accepting mere human tradition that nullifies the word of God, saying to the scribes and Pharisees, “For the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God.” Matt. 15:6
- ❖ He is speaking here not of the scribes and Pharisees’ teaching, however, as much as their conduct.
- ❖ For elsewhere He says, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.” Matt. 23:2-3
- ❖ Jesus affirms these ordained teachers of Israel retain their authority to teach in spite of their personal failings; and the people are obliged to obey their teaching because they “sit on Moses’ seat.”

The Seat of Authority

- ❖ This sacred tradition of the chair of Moses goes back to God's appointment of Moses in the Old Covenant to serve as His representative among the people.
- ❖ “The people come to me to inquire of God,” Moses says; “when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between a man and his neighbor, and I make them know the statutes of God and his decisions.” Ex. 18:15-16
- ❖ As we see in *Matthew 23*, Moses' authority to settle disputes among the people and to clarify for them divine revelation was handed down through a line of successors to the time of Christ.
- ❖ Moses' role is fulfilled in the New Covenant with the Lord's appointment of Peter to be His vicar, His earthly representative among the people, to settle disputes and teach in His name.



Peter and the Keys

- ❖ Peter's appointment as vicar is prefaced by the Lord's questioning of the Twelve Apostles at Caesarea Philippi, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" Matt. 16:13
- ❖ "Some say John the Baptist," they tell Him, "others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 16:14
- ❖ He then asks, "But who do you say that I am?" 16:15
- ❖ Peter steps forward to speak on their behalf, saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 16:16



Peter and the Keys

- ❖ And the Lord declares to him in turn: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has 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

Peter and the Keys

- ❖ This annunciation of Peter's future role in the Church reveals it will involve proclaiming and defending the identity of Christ, Christianity's central truth ("*Who do you say that I am?*").
- ❖ First, the Lord blessed him, affirming his knowledge is not a matter of human intuition, but of divine revelation.
- ❖ Next, He assigns him his new name: *Peter* or "Rock."
- ❖ This fulfills Our Lord's words to the Apostle at their first meeting: "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephias." John 1:42
- ❖ *Cephias*, which the Evangelist tells us "means Peter," is the phonetic Greek rendering of *Kepha*, the Aramaic word for "Rock."

Peter and the Keys

- ❖ Identifying Peter as the rock of the Church does not diminish Christ's role as the Church's True Rock cf. 1 Cor. 3:11, anymore than calling Abraham "the father of many nations" Gen. 17:5 diminishes the Fatherhood of God.
- ❖ As Pope Boniface VIII declared in 1302: "Of this one and only Church there is one body and one head—not two heads, like a monster—namely Christ, and Christ's vicar is Peter, and Peter's successor." *Unam Sanctam*
- ❖ Christ is the Head of the Church; and Peter is the head only inasmuch as he visibly represents Christ the Head on earth.
- ❖ Peter's rock-likeness is dependent upon Christ's rock-likeness; Christ's rock-likeness is an attribute of His divinity.

Peter and the Keys

- ❖ Having renamed Peter, Jesus then bestows on him the gift of the keys of the kingdom and the authority to bind and loose (or to *forbid* and *permit*), assuring him that his earthly decisions shall be upheld in Heaven.
- ❖ The authority to bind and loose would also be given to the Apostles as a group cf. Matt. 18:18; and their successors, the bishops, have the collective power to pronounce decisions binding upon the faithful when assembled in an ecumenical council in union with the Pope.
- ❖ The power of the keys, however, would be given to Peter alone, signifying his primacy among the Twelve.



Peter and the Keys

- ❖ The symbolism of the keys points back to the ancient custom by which the Davidic king appointed his royal steward overseer of the kingdom in his absence, entrusting him with the key to its gates.
- ❖ In the *Book of Isaiah*, the Lord rebukes the king's steward, Shebna, saying, "I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. . . . And I will place on [your successor's] shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."
22:19, 22



The Gift of Infallibility

- ❖ The Church views Peter's successor, the Bishop of Rome, as possessing the charism of infallibility: the divine protection of the Holy Spirit preventing him from officially teaching error.
- ❖ This gift is necessary in light of Christ's promise in *Matthew 16:19*.
- ❖ For if God is to confirm in Heaven the teachings of Peter on earth, then Peter must be given special grace to keep him from teaching things that are contrary to the will of God.



The Gift of Infallibility

- ❖ Not everything the Pope says or writes is infallible, but only things said or written under particular conditions.
- ❖ It is only when he speaks *ex cathedra* (Latin, “from the chair”) that infallibility comes into play.
- ❖ In order for a statement to be considered *ex cathedra* certain criteria must be met.



The Gift of Infallibility

- ❖ The Pope must intend to address the whole Universal Church, and not merely a segment of it.
- ❖ His statement must involve faith and morals.
- ❖ He must intend to render an irrevocable decision that will be binding on all the faithful.
- ❖ Finally, the Pope must speak with full consent of the will without coercion.
- ❖ Each of these criteria must be met for a papal statement to be considered infallible.

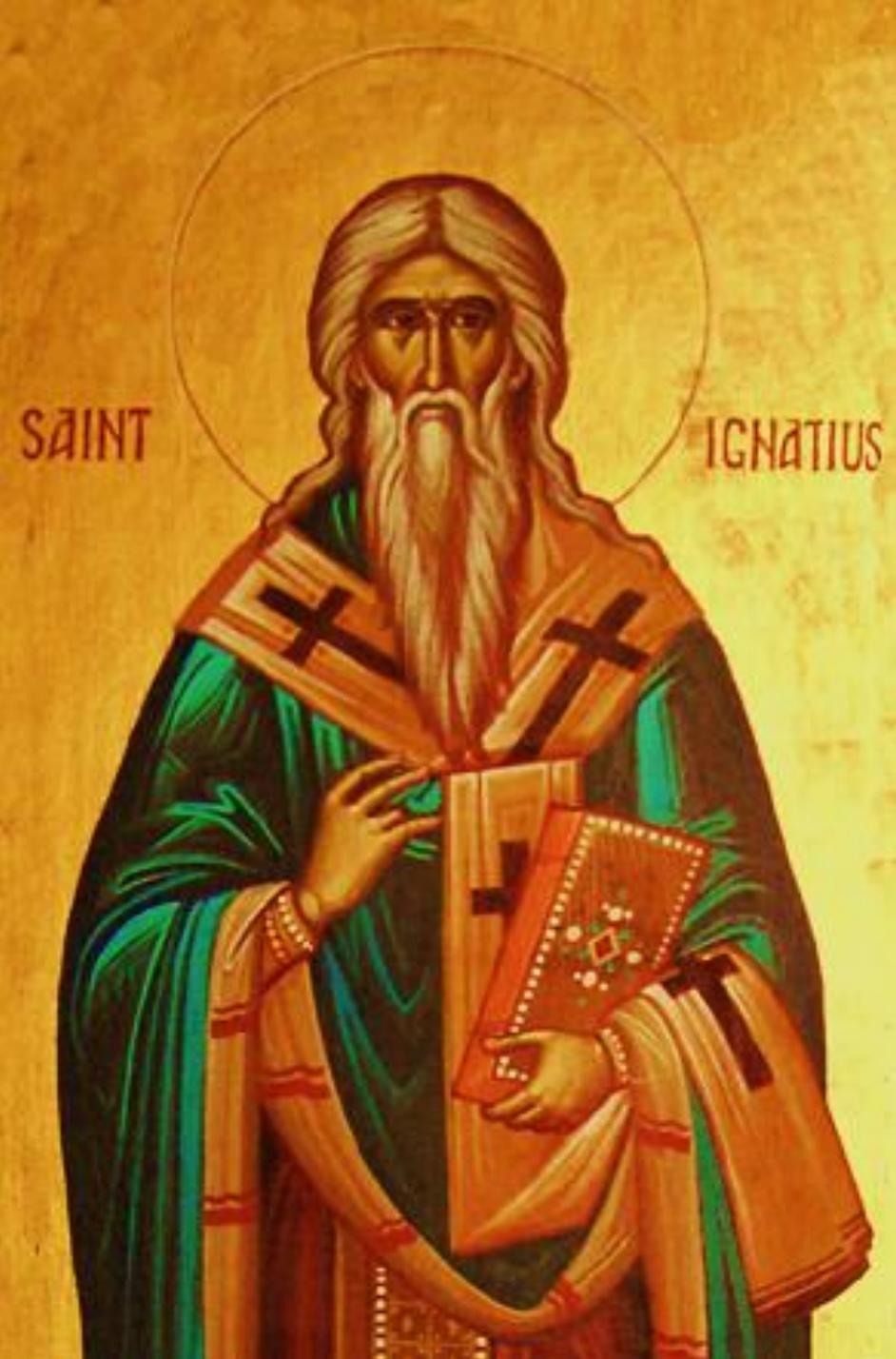
The Gift of Infallibility

- ❖ It is often wrongly assumed that the Pope's personal failings disprove his infallibility.
- ❖ But infallibility has to do strictly with teaching, not personal conduct.
- ❖ The sinfulness of the Church's leaders does not nullify their authority, nor in the case of the popes does it affect their ability to infallibly define doctrine.
- ❖ The Church stands not because of the personal holiness of her leaders, but because of Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit to guide her "into all the truth." John 16:13



Historical Testimony

- ❖ We receive an early historical witness to papal authority from Pope Saint Clement of Rome, the fourth successor of Peter.
- ❖ Writing in about 96 A.D. (while the Apostle John was still living) to address a dispute within the Church at Corinth, Clement admonishes the people to obey the teaching of the Roman Church for God Himself speaks through her.
- ❖ “If anyone disobey the things which have been said by Him through us,” he writes, “let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger.” *Letter to the Corinthians 59:1*



Historical Testimony

- ❖ A decade or so later, in about 107 A.D., Saint Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch and a disciple of the Apostle John, declared the Church of Rome holds “the presidency in love.”

Letter to the Romans, Address

- ❖ And he went on to praise the Apostolic See for its primacy in teaching, saying, “You have envied no one, but others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force.” Ibid. 3:1



Catechetical Series:

What Catholics Believe & Why

Produced by

Behold The Truth

Discovering the What & Why of the Catholic Faith

visit us at

beholdthetruth.com