

one

Need for a Visible Head for the Visible Body of the Church

Not to use too violent an image, but if you cut a person's head off, that person will no longer be able to govern his body. You can't tell your hands what to do or your feet what to do unless you have a head to tell them with. So if the Church is Christ's Body, what is the head that Christ uses to govern this body?

Some people will tell you that Christ Himself is the head. And that's true, of course, if we mean simply that Christ rules over the Church or that Christ is in charge of the Church. But *how* does Christ rule over the Church? After all, we can't see Christ anymore. So, to us, Christ is no longer a visible head of the Church.

So what we need is a Church with a definite, visible structure and a definite, visible source of leadership, which is why Christ gave His Church a Pope.

two

Instituting the Papacy

Jesus officially gave His Church a pope in Matthew 16, after Simon confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus responded by saying, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Jesus makes Peter the Rock (the name "cephas" or "Petros" just means "rock") on which the whole house of the Church is built. He gives Peter the Keys to the Kingdom, which is a sign of authority over the whole Church.

Jesus confirms that authority by saying, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

He says that the jaws of death will not prevail, which means that even though Peter will die, the Church and the office of the papacy that support it, will not.

People always want to know, why do Catholics have a Pope or a Papacy? And there are all kinds of practical answers to that question. But the only really satisfying answer is simply that Jesus gave His Church a Pope and a Papacy. That's why we have it. That's why we will still have it.

three

Other Petrine Passages

There are other passages too where Peter is acknowledged in the New Testament as the Chief Apostle.

For instance, in Luke 22: 28-32, Our Lord gives Peter the exclusive mission of strengthening the other apostles.

In Matthew 17: 24, 27 Christ instructs Peter to pay tax for the both of them together. Peter thus becomes the public representative of Christ. Their identities have become linked, and so too Peter's authority must be respected as Christ's authority.

But two very interesting passages having to do with Peter are Luke 12 and John 21.

In Luke 12, Peter asks if a particular teaching is for everybody. And Jesus says, "Who then, is the faithful and prudent steward *whom the master will put in charge of his servants to distribute the food allowance at the proper time?*" (Luke 12:41-42).

Jesus tells Peter that there's going to be one steward whom the master puts in charge of the other servants. Got that? Jesus says there's going to be a steward who's put in charge of the other servants. What is this steward's job description? To "feed" the servants. Then, after the Resurrection, who is the only Apostle that Jesus instructs to feed all his sheep? That's right – it's Peter. (John 21:15-18). Which means that Peter is the servant who's been put in charge, by the Master, of the other servants.

This is the way God runs his household, by putting one servant in charge of the others. And his household still has a steward, a steward who can trace his lineage back to that first steward, that first rock, the Apostle Peter.

four

Good and Bad Popes over the ages

It's important, when we're talking about the Papacy, to remember what Jesus said to Peter when He first made Him pope. He said, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Simon son of John, but my Father who is in Heaven... What you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven. What you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven."

So Simon gets the right answer, not because of his human character (his “flesh and blood”), but by God’s grace. So too, the Pope will get the right answer to questions about Christ, not because he’s a better human, but because God will keep him safe from error.

There have been bad popes and mediocre popes and saintly popes (just as Peter was sometimes bad, sometimes mediocre, and sometimes saintly), but none of the popes have ever **officially** contradicted one another about the faith. That’s quite an incredible record. It’s almost like the Holy Spirit is ensuring that no Pope, no matter what his personality is, will ever preach heresy with the voice of Peter. That’s a great reassurance.

five

Unity and the Pope

Jesus called Peter the Rock, and said He would build His Church on that Rock. Jesus also said, in the Sermon on the Mount, that if someone doesn’t build his house on the rock, then when the storms come the house will collapse and fall apart.

Those Christian communities, protestants or orthodox, who have rejected the Rock of the Papacy, those communities have fragmented and broken into different groups who will no longer come together in prayer.

The Catholic Church is the community that brings the greatest number of Christians together in common prayer.

If you attack our Pope, then you are attacking our unity. You are attacking the structural integrity of God’s house. May God forbid any of us do such a thing.

We pray for the Pope, the successor of Peter. And we thank God for the Pope, the successor of Peter. Just a man, just an imperfect man. But a man upon which the entire Church depends and the man without whom all unity in the Church would be hopelessly lost.

Let us gather around our Pope like the first Christians gathered around Peter at Pentecost. And may the Holy Spirit continue to support the Rock of our Church.