

# The Papacy is Biblical



What would Jesus say? How would Jesus react to the Papacy? Who is this Pope who oversees and governs the Roman Catholic Church? Many non-Catholics find the existence of the Pope strange and objectionable. But as we will read, the Papacy (the office of Pope) is Biblical and directly tied to the will of Jesus Christ. Christ would approve since it is directly demonstrated from Scripture that he both willed and established the Papacy. In fact, Jesus appointed the first Pope: Simon Peter!

## Jesus Himself Established the Papacy

This is evident in the Scriptures. *When Christ instituted the Twelve, "he constituted [them] in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 880). Hence, Jesus established a structure for the leadership of the Church and the Catholic Church has maintained this structure down through the centuries. The scriptures describe how Christ called leaders from among his disciples whom he named Apostles (*cf* Luke 6:13). We maintain this office of Apostle in the Office of Bishop. From among the Apostles Jesus chose Peter for leadership among the Apostles. We maintain this office of Peter in the office of Papacy. Let's read Scripture and see how Jesus established appointed Peter to headship and, in so doing established the Papacy

## Peter is Rock

The place is Ceasarea Phillipi, a city north of Galilee. Jesus asks, a question, *Who do people say that the Son of Man is?* (Matt 16:13) This question and its answer are critical. Who is Jesus Christ? Sadly the Apostles, as a group, are confused as to the answer. They replied "*Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.*" (Matt 16:14). Such confusion has to be addressed. If even the leaders of the future

Church are divided as to the answer of so critical a question how will the future Church possibly last? So Jesus asks again, this time more personally, *But who do you*

*say that I am?* (Matt 16:15). The answer given must be true and clear. Perhaps there was silence for a moment but then God the Father inspired one Apostle to speak: *Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* And *Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* (Matt 16:16).

Notice that Jesus indicates here that Simon Peter did not say this on his own. He did speak first because he was necessarily the smartest or the quickest. He said this because he was inspired by God the Father.



Peter received a special gift from the Father to proclaim the true and orthodox faith and so to lead his brother Apostles to unity. Jesus emphasizes this as he goes on to declare to Peter: *And I tell you, you are Peter (Rock), 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."* (Mt 16:18-19)

## Peter and the Papacy Depend on God

This is an astonishing on the face of it. Jesus declares he will build his Church on the rock of Peter's faith. Yet, at this point, Peter's faith is not strong. He will resist the cross, flee Christ's side and go so far as to deny him. But remember, Peter is the rock not based on his own merits or virtues but based on what God chooses to do. He will strengthen Peter, so that by Pentecost he will be ready to lead the Church. God will inspire and strengthen Peter to assume his role. Peter will be rock based on God's grace not his own powers.

## Peter will Unify and Strengthen the Church

This dependance on God is taught in another passage that is critical to understanding Peter and his successors in the Papacy. In Luke 22 the Lord pondered the fact that the devil would try to divide the Apostles and the Church. Then he turned to Peter and said, *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [all], that he might sift you like wheat, <sup>32</sup>but I have prayed for thee [Peter] that thy faith may not fail; and when thou hast turned again, strengthen thy brethren.* (Luke 22:31-32). Notice the problem, the Devil would try to divide ("sift") the Church. What is the Lord's solution? He will pray for one man, Peter, that his faith will not fail and that he will in turn strengthen the brethren. Notice here too that the Lord acknowledges that Peter, will first stumble. This happened when he denied the Lord. But the Lord says Peter will turn again and then he will strengthen his brethren. And how will he strengthen them? As a result of the Lord's special prayers for him. He will strengthen and unify the Church against the devil's sifting by the Lord's special grace.

Did Peter go on to do this? Were Jesus' prayers for him evident? In fact, he *did* do these things by the power of God's grace and the Lord's prayer. Here following is a scriptural survey.

### **Is Jesus Risen? Ask Peter!**

In the early hours of the Resurrection the Church was puzzled and divided. Some of the women reported seeing him but many struggled to accept their testimony and there was division. But then the Lord appeared to Peter, prior to the other apostles (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). At this point the apostles and disciples declared, *The Lord is truly risen, he has appeared to Simon!* (Luke 24:34). They said this prior to seeing Jesus for themselves. Notice then, the resurrection becomes official teaching at the moment Peter declares he is risen. Now the Church can say he is truly risen. Peter unifies and strengthens the early Church.

### **Disciplinary Question**

A question arose in Acts Chapter 1 as to what to do with the vacancy in the college of Apostles now that Judas had committed suicide. In the gathering, Peter arose and declared, "Let another his office take." He then set criteria for the office holder and candidates were selected based on them. Matthias was chosen. Here too Peter leads, unifies, teaches and strengthens the brethren, assisted by Jesus' prayer and grace.

### **Paul Submits to Peter**

It will also be noted that when the Paul, after his conversion and prior to his missionary work went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter for fifteen days. After this he began missionary work in Syria (Gal 1:18-21) Paul later made another visit to Peter and the other Apostles. He made this visit "*lest the course he had been running might be in vain*" (Gal 2:2). In other words Paul was submitted to the authority of Peter, first of all and then also the other Apostles. The Catholic Church continues to maintain this Biblical perspective that the Christian ought to be submitted to Peter (the Pope) and the Apostles (the bishops in union with the Pope). (cf CCC # 892) Bishops themselves, like Paul, are expected to make regular visits to the Pope and are expected to be submitted to him

### **A Mission Critical Question!**

At another moment a debate broke out among the early Christians as to the baptism of Gentiles (cf Acts 10-11). The early Church was slow to move on Christ's mandate to Baptize and teach all the nations. Peter was at prayer and the Lord gave him a vision wherein he solemnly reminded Peter that no one was beyond salvation. (Acts 10:9-20)

Immediately thereafter Peter was summoned to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. Instructed by the Spirit Peter went there. Later he had him baptized with his whole household. (Acts 10:48) When some expressed shock (Acts 11:3) Peter taught with authority what he had done. The critics relented when they heard Peter's word that he had been guided by God: *When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life.* (Acts 11:18) Here again in this critical matter the Church was divided and in need of being unified and encouraged to fulfill its mission to the Gentiles. So the Lord guided Simon Peter and through him taught the early Church with authority and unified it.

### **A Matter of Great Debate**

Another matter related to the Gentiles occurred in Acts 15. Although it was now agreed to accept Gentile converts there arose a dispute as to what norms these converts should follow. Should they be compelled to accept Jewish customs and dietary laws or was it sufficient to require the moral law of Christ and faith in Him. The Church was strongly divided. The rift was serious enough that a Council of the Church was summoned. This matter was to be resolved by the Apostles and other leaders. It would seem that the debates were lively (cf Acts 15:7) Finally, Peter arose and spoke (Acts 15:6-7) ruling that the Gentiles should not be compelled to become culturally like the Jews. At this the "assembly fell silent" (Acts 15:8). Paul and Barnabas then spoke in support of Peter. The Apostle James (who had probably been on the opposite side) then arose and, referring to Peter's intervention, affirmed the consensus that the Gentiles not be compelled to live as Jews. Once again, note Peter's role in unifying the early Church and teaching with authority. The Catholic Church continues to maintain this Biblical model of problem solving and decision making through the use of Councils. Councils are gatherings of bishops from around the world in union with the Pope. They are called to solve more difficult problems, or resolve matters of theological disputes. *But there never is an ecumenical council which is not confirmed or at least recognized as such by Peter's successor.* (CCC # 884)

### **The Biblical Roots Run Deep**

To this day the Church has maintained

the Biblical vision of the Peter's mission in the Papacy. What the Lord Jesus established the early Church manifested and obeyed. Peter was the Rock, the visible manifestation of Christ's own authority. The early Church looked to Peter for leadership and accepted the fact that Christ prayed for him in a special way so that he could unify and strengthen them. The wisdom of Christ is clear: a visible vicar is necessary to represent him. The word "vicar" means "representative". The Pope represents Christ, who is the head of the Body, the Church.

### **Protestant Experiments**

The Protestant churches which broke away from the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (and more recently) all claimed that no visible earthly representative was necessary for Christ; that Christ ruled the Church from heaven. They further claimed that Scripture alone was the source of unity and authority. But note the sad legacy of dis-unity that has resulted from that. These Protestant groups have splintered into some 10,000 Protestant denominations. They all claim to follow Christ and the authority of the Bible yet they have significant differences over scriptural interpretations, salvation, sacraments, and authority. Without Peter to unite them, they are divided endlessly. There is no way for them to resolve differences for there is no final authority. They all claim Christ but cannot agree on what Christ is saying. The result is division after division.

### **The Papacy Makes Sense**

There is great wisdom in what Christ established from the beginning. The Catholic Church clings to this model. We trust that Christ continues to pray for the successor of Peter, the Pope just as he promised (Luke 22:32). Though the devil tries to sift us like wheat and shatter our unity, Christ prays for Peter and his successors. The gates of hell will not prevail over the Church founded on the Rock of Peter and blessed by God. In this way (Mt. 16:18). The Catholic Church has maintained the Papacy in an unbroken line going all the way back to Simon Peter. Following Christ's vision, accepting his model of authority we have maintained what he himself established and decreed. As a Bible Believing Church we look to Christ's vicar and unite under his authority. Of course Jesus would be pleased, he willed it to be so. Of this fact Scripture is clear.