

LEADER



BUILT TO LAST

A Retreat Guide on St. Peter and the Papacy

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Produced by Coronation
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FIRST MEDITATION

THE PAPACY IN THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

Christ entrusted the task of evangelizing the world to his Twelve Apostles. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all point out how at the start of his ministry Jesus “called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles” (Luke 6:13). From then on, the Twelve stayed with him and received his special attention. After his resurrection, when their preparation was complete, he gave them their mission. He delegated to them his authority to forgive sins and commanded them, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (John 20:21). And as soon as the Apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they began to fulfill that command, traveling throughout the world and establishing Christian communities everywhere.

A CHURCH STRUCTURED FROM THE START

They organized these communities just as they themselves had been organized by Christ: after preaching, baptizing, and confirming the founding members of each community, they would ordain “overseers” (bishops) and “elders” (presbyters, or priests) to carry on the work of evangelization there. Then they would move on to do the same thing elsewhere.

This process is discernible in the writings of the New Testament, although it is never described in detail—it didn’t have to be, since the early Christians experienced it firsthand. Even so, St. Paul mentions it explicitly—for example, in his second letter to Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2, where he writes: “[W]hat you have heard from me ... entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul alludes to four generations in this one sentence: first his own generation, which included the Twelve Apostles, then Timothy’s generation of bishops appointed by the Apostles, then the generation of bishops who will come after Timothy, and then the ones who will come after them.

Already around the year 96, Pope St. Clement I was able to write:

Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers ... and afterwards [they] added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.

—Letter to the Corinthians, 42

Clearly, the first Christians saw themselves as members of an Apostolic Church, one that could trace its origins back to the Twelve Apostles.

LED BY THE BISHOP OF ROME

But Jesus had not left this “Apostolic College,” as it is called, without a head. Just as Moses had transferred his authority to Joshua to lead God’s people into the Promised Land, so Christ gave Simon Peter a special role among the Twelve. Christ’s vision for the Church was that “there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16). He himself will always remain the “chief shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4), or pastor, but he arranged to exercise his pastoral office through the ministry of the Apostles, under the leadership of Peter.

This leadership role was made explicit both before and after Christ’s resurrection. For example, Peter’s name is at the top of every list of the Twelve Apostles that appears in the Gospels. He was the only Apostle whose name was solemnly changed, from “Simon” to “Peter” (John 1:42), which means “rock.” In Matthew 16 Jesus himself tells us the reason behind this name change.

Blessed are you, Simon ... I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld 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.

—Matthew 16: 18–19

His name was changed to reflect Christ’s vision for his role in the Church—that of being the “rock,” the sturdy foundation that will give the Church its unshakable stability and unity.



This role was clarified and reinforced after Christ's resurrection. In John 21 we read of a unique conversation in which Christ elicits Peter's profession of faith and love three times, and three times he commissions him as the leading shepherd of his Church: "Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep," he commands him.

successions 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 ... 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 3:3:1,2
A.D. 189

THE PAPACY GETS GOING

Peter starts acting in accordance with this special role immediately after Christ ascends into heaven. In the Book of Acts, it is Peter who finds a replacement for Judas; it is Peter's address to the crowds after Pentecost that wins over the first wave of new believers; it is Peter who is recognized as expressing God's plan for evangelizing the gentiles in the so-called "Council of Jerusalem." Already in the very first actions of the Church, then, the Apostolic College was fulfilling its God-given task, and Peter was acting as its head.

This function of primacy in the Apostolic College, the instrument of the Church's unity and stability, was willed by Christ to extend beyond Peter's own lifetime. And the Church progressively recognized that the Holy Spirit was maintaining it through the bishopric of Rome, the city where Peter himself had preached the faith as bishop and given his life as martyr. This Petrine Ministry, as the primacy in the Apostolic College came to be called much later, was thus passed on to the succeeding bishops of Rome, just as the authority of the other Apostles to teach and administer the sacraments in Jesus' name was passed on to their successors, the other bishops.

CONCLUSION: AN EARLY WITNESS

This was already being understood as early as the second century, when St. Irenaeus of Lyons wrote:

It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times ... But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the successions of all the churches, we shall ... [point] out here the

The papacy is part of God's plan for his Church. The pope's role of protecting and teaching the true Catholic faith through the centuries, as well as his service of providing a firm anchor of unity for a spiritual family with more than a billion members, are part of the method by which the Holy Spirit wants to guide each and every one of us to spiritual fulfillment and fruitfulness.

Too many of us haven't thought very deeply or prayerfully about this central Christian truth. Let's take some time to do so right now. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/ GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is my habitual attitude towards the papacy? Considering that it is such an important aspect of God's plan for his Church, what should my attitude be?
2. Why would Jesus have chosen to create a Church with a visible structure, with delegated authority, with a clear organization? What benefit does this give me as a Christian trying to grow in my relationship with God?
3. The Catholic Church can trace its history all the way back to the time of Christ himself, with no ruptures in its faith or its worship. I am a member of this Church, and its story is my story. How do I feel about that? How should I feel about that?



THREE QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR MEDITATION

☞ When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “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 gates of the netherworld 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.” Then he strictly ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah.

—Matthew 16:13–20
NABRE

☞ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

—John 1:35–42
NABRE

☞ 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.” He then said to him a second time, “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 distressed that he had said to him a 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. Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.”

—John 21:15–19
NABRE

NOTES



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SECOND MEDITATION

ST. PETER THE WEAK

INTRODUCTION

Jesus chose to structure his Church with bishops and a pope, but he gave no guarantee that those bishops and popes would all be saints. Jesus is still the head of his Church, even though the Holy Spirit guides the Church through human instruments and structures. The papacy is the foremost of those structures, the unbreakable “rock” upon which the Church is built to last, as we saw in the first meditation. But if popes are just normal, sinful human beings, like the rest of us, where does the rock’s stability and strength come from? In answering that question, we will also find spiritual comfort for our own struggles and hardships.

THE PRIMACY OF GRACE

The Peter whom Christ chose to be the solid “rock” foundation of his Church is the same Peter who denied our Lord three times the night Jesus was arrested, before the rooster crowed. He betrayed his Lord, Savior, and friend when being questioned by a mere servant girl on that fateful night. That’s hardly the kind of dependability you would expect from a rock. Christian tradition tells us that Peter wept for this sin at least once every day for the rest of his life, until the tears wore two pale tracks down the skin of his face. This man seems an unlikely choice for the first pope.

The history of the Church is full of similar cases—men and women who seem hopelessly weak and far from God become beacons of holiness and culture-transforming soldiers of Christ. How does it happen? What changes them into saints, martyrs, and history-makers? God’s grace: the same grace that has kept the Church alive and growing for twenty centuries; the same grace that has given the papacy its rock-like stability throughout the storms of history; the same grace that each one of us received at baptism.

By choosing a man like Peter to be the first pope, God wanted to make it clear from the very beginning that the Church is made up of sinful, weak human beings, and that its amazing spiritual fruitfulness is due not just to human effort, but to divine grace. And the same thing applies to our own personal lives as members of

this Church: our success and fulfillment as Christians depends more on his grace than our efforts.

ST. PETER’S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE


We see this truth dramatically at work in a passage from the Acts of the Apostles that shows our first pope being persecuted and thrown into prison. King Herod, egged on by the same leaders of Jerusalem who had done away with Jesus at the time of the crucifixion, arrested Peter for spreading the Christian faith. And Herod put him under maximum security while waiting for trial. In his prison cell, Peter was secured by “double chains”—his wrists were chained to the wrists of the two guards sleeping right beside him in the prison. At the main entrance to the prison building and at the interior entrance to the lower section of the prison, more guards kept watch; they were taking no risks. This is why Herod had to have four squads of four guards: each squad was on duty for two three-hour shifts per day. Here’s how the Book of Acts describes the situation:

“He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf.

—Acts 12:4–5

The Bible records these details to convince us that Peter’s escape was absolutely impossible, naturally speaking. But “what is impossible for human beings is possible for God.” (Luke 18:27). And so, in the middle of the night an angel appears to St. Peter, the manacles fall off his wrists, and an angelic light guides him through the maze of dungeons, past the outer guards, and through the locked iron gate of the prison complex.



 Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, “Get up quickly.” The chains fell from his wrists ... They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him.


—Acts 12:7,10

Could Peter have done any of that if he had been depending just on his own smarts and abilities? Of course not! Only the power of God could have freed Peter from the depths of that dark prison. What Peter had to do was believe, cooperate and obey. This was the spiritual experience of the first pope, and it has remained the fundamental truth about the papacy ever since. Whether an individual pope is a saint or a rogue, the rock foundation of the Church remains dependable, because God has chosen to make it so.

FOLLOWING IN PETER’S FOOTSTEPS

But it’s not just God’s way of working with the papacy. The same truth applies to our own lives as well. We are Peter. Our sins and selfishness are the chains that bind us to frustration and anxiety. The devil and the sinful world are the guards that hold us back from spiritual freedom. And by our own strength we can do nothing to escape. It is God’s grace, freely given to us in Christ, that forgives our sins, enlightens our confusion, strengthens us against temptation, and leads us to a truly meaningful life, starting here on earth and reaching its fulfillment in heaven.

If we depend primarily on our own efforts to achieve spiritual maturity, we will never get there. We need to discover and accept our human weakness, as St. Peter did especially through his painful betrayal of Jesus on Holy Thursday, in order to make room for God’s grace to guide and transform us. Jesus made this clear during the Last Supper, when he told his Apostles:

 *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.*

—John 15:5

CONCLUSION: GOD’S PATIENT DEPENDABILITY

St. Peter’s relationship with Jesus, as described throughout the New Testament, progresses only insofar as he gradually learns this lesson of his human weakness and his need for God’s saving grace. Throughout that journey, God is patient with him, never giving up on him, never condemning him, always giving him another chance. And the way God treated St. Peter in the New Testament is the way he has worked through the papacy in every period of the Church’s history—patiently remaining faithful to his promise of divine guidance and protection, in spite of even the most persistent human weakness and sin.

And that’s also how God works with us—never giving up on us, never getting tired of our foibles and failings, always looking for new ways to convince us that even though we are undependable and weak, he is dependable and strong.

Let’s take some time now to reflect prayerfully on this divine methodology in the Church and in the life of each Christian. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/ GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Why doesn’t God make every pope a perfect saint? Why doesn’t he protect his Church from all scandal and sin? Why doesn’t he keep me from making any mistakes and make it impossible for me to give in to temptation?
2. The Catechism (#311) quotes St. Augustine about why God permits evil in the world: “For almighty God ... because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.” How does this truth of our faith apply to the papacy? How does it apply to my own spiritual life?
3. When have I experienced that “what is impossible for human beings is possible for God” (Luke 18:27)? How firmly do I believe in this biblical truth? What impact does this have on my daily life? What impact should it have?



THREE QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR MEDITATION

☞ *About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also. (It was [the] feast of Unleavened Bread.) He had him taken into custody and put in prison under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. He intended to bring him before the people after Passover. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf. On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter, secured by double chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while outside the door guards kept watch on the prison. Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, “Get up quickly.” The chains fell from his wrists. The angel said to him, “Put on your belt and your sandals.” He did so. Then he said to him, “Put on your cloak and follow me.” So he followed him out, not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter recovered his senses and said, “Now I know for certain that [the] Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting.”*

—Acts 12:1–11
NABRE

☞ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely; in all your ways be mindful of him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes, fear the LORD and turn away from evil; this will mean health for your flesh and vigor for your bones.*

—Proverbs 3:5–8
NABRE

☞ *After [Jesus] had finished speaking, he said to Simon [Peter], “Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.” Simon said in reply, “Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.” When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come to help them. They came and filled both boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at the knees of Jesus and said, “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” For astonishment at the catch of fish they had made seized him and all those with him, and likewise James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners of Simon. Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.*

—Luke 5:4–11
NABRE

NOTES



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CONFERENCE

INFALLIBILITY, MAGISTERIUM, AND THE FREEDOM THEY GIVE

INTRODUCTION

We have seen how the Petrine Ministry, the papacy, is rooted in Christ's plan from the very beginning. And we have seen how the spiritual experience of St. Peter himself, the first pope, shows us that this ministry is an instrument of God's grace, not a merely human power. And so, throughout the history of the Church, the bishop of Rome, as willed by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, has remained the rock, enjoying "full power ... to tend, rule and govern the universal Church," as the First Vatican Council put it.^[1] Through this Petrine Ministry, in other words, Christ continues to shepherd his flock.

But what exactly does that ministry look like? Two essential elements are what tradition and theology call the Magisterium and infallibility. This conference will reflect briefly on each one, and on the profound impact they have for our Christian living.

THE MINISTRY OF TEACHING

A critical component of the papacy's service to the Church is the ministry of teaching. History is constantly presenting new situations, discoveries, and challenges to Christ's followers. The Church's teaching office, called its Magisterium (from the Latin word for teacher, "magister"), exercised by the pope and the bishops in communion with him, is the sure guide through those dangerous waters. It provides a reference point that Christians turn to not only as they seek to know and follow Christ more fully, but also when threatened by confusing, heretical doctrines and moral dilemmas.

By God's grace, this teaching office is supported by the charism, or spiritual gift, of infallibility, of teaching the truth about faith and morals without error. Here's how the Catechism describes both the task of the Magisterium and the role of infallibility within that task:

It is this Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true

faith without error. Thus, the pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abides in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals.

—CCC 890

EXTRAORDINARY AND ORDINARY MAGISTERIUM

This infallibility can be present either through the pope alone, when teaching formally as universal Shepherd (this is known as teaching *ex cathedra*), or through the bishops together with the pope, when they do the same, as in an Ecumenical Council. These solemn, formal declarations are part of what is called the "extraordinary" Magisterium. As one modern theologian explains:

When the extraordinary Magisterium takes the form of papal definitions or conciliar decisions binding on the consciences of all the faithful in matters of faith and morals, it is infallible.^[2]

But even when the pope or the bishops in communion with him don't formally invoke their full magisterial authority, they still receive divine assistance as they teach and guide the Catholic faithful in matters of faith and morals through the normal channels of communication. This is the "ordinary" Magisterium. The charism of infallibility can be present in it too. To quote the same theologian again:

When the ordinary Magisterium is also universal, that is, collectively intended for all the faithful, it is also infallible.^[3]

[1] *Pastor Aeternus*, Chapter 3

[2] Hardon, Fr. John, S.J. *Modern Catholic Dictionary*

[3] *Ibid.*



THE LIMITS OF INFALLIBILITY

Of course, the Church makes no claim to have divine guidance when it comes to subjects outside of faith and morals. If the pope were to publish a mathematics textbook, for example, it would not be protected by the charism of infallibility. Even when it comes to debating public policy, the Church's Magisterium is infallibly dependable on the level of moral principles, but not on the level of prudential applications of those principles—as, for example, when it comes to finding the best legal arrangement to protect the rights of immigrants without compromising the rule of law.

Neither does infallibility guarantee that the pope himself or the bishops will always be saints—that would be “impeccability,” which the Church has never claimed. Nor does the infallibility enjoyed by the Magisterium insure that every individual bishop teaching on his own will be free from error—only those bishops who teach in communion with the pope and the entire college of bishops stay securely under the umbrella of divine assistance. Furthermore, just because the pope and the bishops enjoy the charism of infallibility doesn't mean that we will always necessarily like their personalities or leadership styles, but we are always called to show true religious respect for their person and their office.

THE SUREST REFERENCE POINT


In questions of Church teaching and practice, then, the litmus test always boils down to this: where does the pope really stand? No other reference point has been given the divine guarantee.

It's not always easy for us sinful human beings to accept the authority of the Church's Magisterium. Many times intellectual pride has led to rebellion against papal authority in doctrinal matters. Other times, thirst for power and influence has led to schism—rebellion against papal authority in Church discipline. And there have even been times when certain popes behaved more like worldly princes than Christ's Chief Shepherd, which only aggravated these rebellions.

But the scandalous chapters in the history of the papacy only highlight its supernatural origin and mission. In spite of them, the Catholic Church has endured and the papacy has endured, and no pope has ever propagated opposition to the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Apostles. Many great patriarchs of the ancient Church fell at some time or another

into heresy, but not the bishop of Rome; all the great kingdoms and empires of the world come and go, but the Church sails steadily on with the pope at its helm. Christians who break away from communion with Peter's successor cannot long keep themselves united, as the current division of Protestantism into over twenty-thousand denominations testifies, but those who have stayed in step with the pope have consistently adorned the Church with new congregations, apostolates, and religious orders, while staying firmly grounded in the ancient faith.

What other explanation is there for such a remarkable phenomenon except the presence of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling the promise that Christ made to Peter back in the first century:

 *And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.*

—Matthew 16:18

CONCLUSION: FREEDOM AND TRUTH

Viewed from this perspective, the papacy is one of God's greatest gifts to us. Only Catholics can really know when their local pastor is wrong—they can compare what he says to the official teaching of the Church, found, for example, in the Catechism. Only Catholics can know for certain that they are giving God the worship that pleases him most by following the liturgy of Christ's own Church. Catholic scholars and intellectuals can speed confidently forward more than any others in their pursuit of truth and understanding, because only they have the firm guardrails of the Magisterium to help protect them from pride and error.

Around the year 400, St. Jerome compared the Church, with the pope at its head, to Noah's Ark. He wrote in a letter, “Anyone who is not in the ark of Noah will perish when the flood prevails.” Just so, Jesus has only given his divine guarantee to one Church, the Church that he built to last on the rock of Peter. Certainly this does not mean that those who, through no fault of their own, remain outside the Catholic Church are all going to hell.^[4] But it does mean that those who want to be fully faithful to Jesus Christ and experience the full joy of his friendship, will stay in step with his Vicar on earth. If they do, they will find in the pope not just a wise and good man, but an instrument of grace or,



as St. Catherine of Siena put it back in the fourteenth century, “My sweet Christ on earth.” Take some time now to reflect on the ten questions in the personal questionnaire, designed to help apply these theological truths to our daily life.

PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Up to this point in my life, what has my attitude to the papacy been characterized by? Having reflected in this Retreat Guide on our Lord’s vision for the papacy, what do I think it should be characterized by?
2. What kind of effort do I tend to make to deepen my knowledge of the official teaching of the Church’s magisterium? What kind of effort should I be making?
3. What is my attitude to authority in general, and where does that attitude come from? What is my attitude towards proper authority in the Church?
4. Many Catholics habitually criticize bishops and popes. When is this kind of criticism constructive for the Church, and when is it destructive?
5. Here is how the Second Vatican Council describes the proper attitude towards God-given authority in the Church. How would I put this in my own words?



Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent. This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra.

—*Lumen Gentium*, 25

6. When someone’s enthusiasm for the pope is based only on emotions, what problems can it cause?
7. Many non-Catholic Christians have a distorted understanding of the papacy and infallibility. What are some of their criticisms, and how would I respond to them?

8. The sins and flaws of the Church’s sacred ministers have wounded many Catholics. Some Catholics have even left the Church as a result of these experiences. Is that an adequate response? Why or why not?
9. What aspects of the papacy seem to attract the attention of the secular media and why? As Catholics, how should we respond to the secular media’s treatment of the papacy and the Church?
10. How often do I pray for my bishop and for the pope? How often should I pray for them?

NOTES

[4] The Catechism, quoting the Second Vatican Council, explains this in numbers 846–848: “How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body: “Basing itself on Scripture and Tradition, the Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it.” This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.”



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FURTHER READING

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

- *Pope Fiction: Answers to 30 Myths and Misconceptions about the Papacy*
by Patrick Madrid
- *Upon this Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church*
by Stephen K. Ray
- *How Firm a Foundation*
by Marcus Grodi

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