

II - The Papacy

It is an institution by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Simon, son of Jona, originally from Bethsaida in Galilee, later lived in Capharnaum at the lake of Genesareth. One day his brother Andrew, who was also a fisherman "brought him to Jesus, who looking upon him, said: Thou art Simon the son of Jona, thou shall be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter [i.e., the rock]" (John I, 42). Now we know from all sacred history that when God imposes a special name on someone, He imposes with it a special mission connected with this name. Our Blessed Lord has so chosen Peter to be the rock on which He would build His Church, and while looking on him in this first meeting He saw the whole row of popes throughout the history of Christianity.

In all lists of the apostles Simon Peter always holds the first place. Our Lord visited his house in Carpharnaum, where He healed his mother-in-law from a fever. We read about no other visit of Jesus to the house of another Apostle. One day He preached from a ship, it was the ship of Peter. We understand this ship to be the symbol of the Church, and so does Our Lord preach the enlightening faith and saving doctrine in and from the Church of Peter, from no other "church".

We see later on, how Our Lord promised to Peter the apostolic primacy, to be His vicar on earth. We are in the quarters of Cesarea Philippi where Jesus:

asks His disciples saying: Whom do men say that the Son of man is? But they said: Some John the Baptist, and others say Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. But Jesus saith to them: But whom do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said: Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven.

By divine inspiration, you have said Who I am. By My divine word, I will tell you who you are:

That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shall bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth, it shall be loosed in heaven. (Mat.16, 13-19).

The Church of the Incarnate Word would be built on Peter, the Rock, and Peter will have the keys of heaven, that is to say, supreme power in the house of God.

There is another significant event for Peter: Our Lord prayed in a very special manner for him: And the Lord said: Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren. (Luke 22, 31).

Nowhere in the Holy Scripture do we read that Our Lord has prayed in such a way for any other of His twelve Apostles; also, we must have in mind that the prayer of Our Lord High Priest is always efficient Already here, Our Lord speaks about a conversion of Peter, and that he would then have the mission to confirm the Apostles and the faithful in the Faith.

After His resurrection Jesus instituted Peter as the supreme shepherd of His flock (John 21, 15). We see some of the disciples of Jesus going fishing, and after a fruitless night in the morning Our Lord standing at the shore gave them the order to cast once again the net which then was filled with a multitude of big fish. After the breakfast, Jesus said to Peter:

Simon, son of John, love thou Me more than these? He saith to Him: Yea, Lord, you know that I love Thee. He said to him: Feed my lambs. He saith to him again: Simon, son of John, do you love thou Me? He saith to Him: Yea, Lord, you know that I love Thee. He said to him: Feed my lambs. He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, do you love thou Me? Peter was grieved, because He had said to him the third time: Do you Love Me? And he said lo Him: Lord, You know all things: Thou knows that I love Thee. He said lo him: Feed my sheep.

So here the Divine Redeemer realized what He promised in the quarters of Cesarea Philippi and instituted Peter as shepherd of the sheep and supreme shepherd of the shepherds.

Going through the gospel we see the faithfulness, the devotion, still more a profound faith and a burning love of this man for the Divine Master. He is even ready lo go lo prison and to death with Him (Luke 22, 33).

But this man also has his weaknesses. Just after the promise to Peter that later on he would be the rock of the Church, Jesus foretold His Passion lo His disciples:

From that time Jesus began to shew to his disciples, that he must lo Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the ancients and ascribes and chief priests, and be put to death, and the third day rise again. And Peter taking Him, began to rebuke Him, saying: "Lord, be il far from Thee, this shall not be unto Thee" (Mat. 16, 21-22).

So he wanted to hinder the Divine Savior from fulfilling the mission His Father entrusted lo Him, that is to say, lo redeem us by His painful Passion on the cross. Peter expected, as most of the Jews, a more temporal redeemer, he had not yet understood the way of Calvary. Jesus corrected him with words very astonishing for the one lo whom He had just promised the keys of heaven: "Go behind me, Satan! Thou art a scandal unto Me because thou savors are not the things that are of God but the things that are of men" (v. 23). Isn't il surprising, very surprising, that Jesus calls the first pope a Satan?

In the night of the Passion Peter, having testified his faithfulness with words, then denied his Master three limes swearing and cursing that he knew not the man (Mat. 26, 74). During three years he had heard all the heavenly preaching, saw all the miracles, was warned several times about this hour of passion — and he became weak, very weak, bul when the cock crew and the sight of Our Lord fell on him, he understood his big sin and going forth he wept bitterly.

Now we could say that these weaknesses were in Peter before the sending of the Holy Ghost by which the Apostles were confirmed in sanctifying grace, confirmed in the apostolic mission. But even after Pentecost we hear about another weakness of Peter. There were two sorts of Christians in the

early Church: converted Jews and converted heathens, and the Apostles had well established that these converted heathens are not bound to the law of Moses, but they were of the same dignity as the converted Jews, faith having purified their hearts. Peter living in Antioch was in communion with both parts until some of the converted Jews from Jerusalem came to Antioch. Then Peter withdrew and separated himself from the converted pagans by fear of the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem.

St. Paul tells us the story in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians:

But when Cephas was to come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that some came from James [bishop of Jerusalem], he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separates himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision. And to his dissimulation the rest of the Jews consented, so that Barnabas also was led by them into that dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly unto the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all: If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as the Jews do, how dost thou compel the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. II, 11-14).

St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, bishop according to his rank, withstood Peter, the Pope, publicly to the face, because he walked not uprightly unto the truth of the gospel! What a lesson for the history of the Church!

And still another event is quite remarkable for our consideration: We already heard about the miraculous catch of fish after the resurrection of Our Lord at the lake of Genesareth. When John, who was in the ship with Peter, realized the miracle, he recognized immediately the author comprehending this person on the shore to be the Lord Himself. Peter did not draw this conclusion, he did not understand. John is the bishop, Peter is the pope. It is John who makes Peter aware: "It is the Lord*" (John 21,7). There might be situations in the Church when a bishop has to tell the pope: "It is the Lord". Buddha is not the true God, nor is Mohammed the true prophet, neither will Assisi meetings [1] bring peace to earth; there is only one true God, the Holy Trinity, there is only one true mediator between God and man, Our Lord Jesus Christ, God made man, and there can be no peace on earth beside Him, Prince of peace. "Dominus est!" — "It is the Lord!"

Later on Peter died in Rome as a martyr [2] being crucified with the head downwards, after having founded the local Church in Antioch and the Apostolic See in Rome; that is why the office of the supreme shepherd of the Church for all times will be linked to the bishop of Rome; the pope can take his residence for a certain time or even for a long time outside of Rome, but always and only the bishop of Rome will be the Vicar of Christ on earth. That is why the roman local Church is the first of all local churches in the whole world, she is Mater and Magistra, mother and teacher of all the others. This very fact makes us understand the importance of the Roman Church for our being a Catholic.

In fact Divine Providence which guides all things has prepared the Roman Empire with its capital for the Incarnation of the Son of God and the spreading of His Gospel. When Our Lord was born in Bethlehem, Judea was

under Roman domination, and the Roman Empire with all its links of culture and trade covered practically the whole then known world. Roman families, among them many from nobility, supported the Apostles, put their houses to the disposal for the celebration of the Holy Mass which later on were very often converted into churches, and many of them not only gave their goods for the Church but even their lives. Archbishop Lefebvre in his *Spiritual Journey* [3] (p. 71-73; written in 1989) has written some wonderful pages about "The providential choice of Rome as the seat of Peter, and the blessings of this choice for the growth of the Mystical Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ":

Excerpt from *Spiritual Journey*
Removed from this section to stay on topic of papacy by Dan S.

The line of St. Peter

Peter had his successor as bishop of Rome: Linus; Cletus followed him, then Clemens... till Benedict XVI in our days. The first 35 popes were all martyrs, men who offered their lives for the Catholic Faith. But we also see other wonderful personalities in the Apostolic See: St. Leo the Great with his wonderful theological sermons and the strength with which he drove away Attila; St. Gregory the Great, sending St. Augustine and his monks to the Anglo-Saxons to convert them; Gregory VII, who withstood to the face the German emperor Henry IV and fought for the liberty of the Church. St. Pius V who appealed for a crusade against the Turks, the Pope of Lepanto, the Rosary and our Roman Missal; Bl. Pius IX, the Pope of the Immaculata and of the first Vat*can Council. St. Pius X, the great pope in his fight against modernism and the enemies of Christianity; Bl. Pius XII, with his wonderful statements concerning all the problems of the social area. They are all the true heirs of St. Peter.

But we also see popes with astonishing weaknesses, sometimes in their private life, like for example Alexander VI, sometimes in their government like the popes in the tenth century called the "Saeculum obscurum" — the dark century, sometimes even weak in the defense of the faith like Pope Liberius who approved of a synod which excommunicated the great defender of the divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ: St. Athanasius. [5]

And what must we say about Pope Honorius who held the Apostolic See from 625 to 638 and was condemned by the following third Council of Constantinople and even by the following Pope Leo II because he was weak in his defense of the Catholic truth teaching us that there are two natures in Our Lord, the divine nature and the human nature with the true human will. After his death Honorius was excommunicated by the mentioned Council, Leo II approved of this, but he never was declared not to have been the pope. He was not declared directly an heretic but favoring heresy.

So we see that not only the faithfulness and the love of Peter for his Divine Master passed over to his successors, but also some of his weaknesses.

This article has been minimized to stay on topic of papacy historical assurances.