

The Pope, the Vicar of Christ

"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. And I say to thee: 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 shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in Heaven." (Matthew 16:15-19)

1. What did Jesus do to make sure His Church would always be united?

He put one man in complete charge of His Church. "If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand." (Mark 3:24-25)

1. Who has complete charge of the Church?

The Pope, who is the bishop of Rome and the Vicar (agent) of Christ on earth.

2. Who is the Pope?

The Pope is the visible head of the whole Catholic Church. "And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them." (Ezekiel 34:23)

3. Who was the first Pope?

St. Peter, who was made Pope by Jesus Christ Himself.

4. When did Jesus promise to make Peter the Pope?

Several months before He died. "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build My Church." (Matthew 16:18)

5. When did Jesus actually make Peter the first Pope?

Shortly before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus gave Peter complete authority over the whole Church. "Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Feed my lambs...feed my lambs...feed my sheep.'" (John 21:15-17)

6. Did Peter's authority die with him?

No, it was handed down to a man named Linus, and after he died (78 A.D.), it was handed down to Cletus (d. 90 A.D.), and then to Clement (d. 100 A.D.), and after that to another, and so on, during the past nearly 2,000 years. "Where Peter is, there is the Church." (St. Ambrose, in the 4th Century)

7. Do all Catholics have to obey the Pope?

Yes, because he speaks with the authority of Christ. Catholics, however, have to obey the Pope only in regard to matters of religion.

8. Can the Pope make an error when teaching religion?

No, not when he speaks as head of the whole Church. "Simon, Simon...I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren." (Luke 22:31-32)

GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

The Pope, also called our Holy Father and the Sovereign Pontiff, lives in Vatican City, which is in Rome, Italy. St. Peter died in Rome, and ever since then, the Bishop of Rome has been the Pope. When the Pope dies, the Cardinals elect his successor. There have been 266 Popes as of Pope Francis I.

The world is divided up into territories called dioceses. Each diocese is ruled over by a bishop. A diocese is divided into parishes, which are ruled over by pastors. A pastor may have one or several priests to assist him.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Papal infallibility means that the Pope, when speaking as head of the whole church on matters of faith or morals, cannot teach error. Infallibility is not to be confused with impeccability, which means that one cannot commit sin. The Pope is not impeccable; he can sin.

2. One of the reasons why there are so many different kinds of Protestants (over 300 kinds) is that there is no Protestant church that has one man holding complete authority from God. They are, "Like sheep that have no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36). We should pray for them. "Other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." (John 10:16)