



## Understanding the Papacy

### Discussion Notes

*St. Peter and his successors are the unique representatives (“Vicars”) of Christ. Three biblical images show this—Peter as the Rock, Peter as the keeper of the keys, and Peter as the Shepherd.*

*Although Jesus is the ultimate “Rock,” the foundation of the Church, he gives Simon the name “Peter” (“Rock”) and calls him the foundation of the Church.*

1 Corinthians 3:11

[N]o one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:18

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.

*See also Psalm 18:3, 32; John 1:42; Ephesians 2:19—21*

*Jesus is the new king of Israel, the descendent of David. In the Kingdom of Israel, the one who held the keys of the Kingdom for the king was the “al-habbayit” (“master/regent of the palace,” one who is “over the house”) who represented the king and ruled in his absence. By giving him the keys, Jesus gave Peter this office.*

Isaiah 22:15, 19—22

Up, go to that official, Shebna, master of the palace. [Say to him:] I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station. On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah; I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.

Matthew 16:18

[Jesus said to Peter,] “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.”

*See also 2 Chronicles 26:21; 2 Kings 18:18; Genesis 41:39 - 44*

*Although Jesus himself is the “Good Shepherd,” he gives Peter the responsibility and authority to tend and to feed the flock of the Church.*

John 10:11—15

I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a

shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

John 21:15—19

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."

*See also Ezekiel 34:11—12*

*Division in humanity is the consequence of sin. Consider, for example, the murder of Abel by Cain after the fall, the diversity of languages following the construction of the tower of Babel, the division of the Kingdom of Israel because of the sins of the king, and the scattering of the tribes of Israel because of the sins of the Israelites. Christ desired to unite his Church in faith (see John 17:17—21; Philippians 2:5; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1—6)*

*As the representative of Jesus, Peter had the role of working to maintain unity in the faith among Christians. In Acts 15, he led the Council to settle the question of whether Gentiles had to follow the Jewish law when becoming Christian. St. Paul conferred with him to ensure that his teachings were correct (Galatians 1:18, 2:1—2). Early Christians agreed that the successor of Peter had this same role:*

St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was a bishop taught by the Apostle John, wrote in 110 A.D.:

Ignatius . . . to the church also which holds the presidency, in the location of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you hold the presidency in love, named after Christ and named after the Father

St. Irenaeus, who was taught by St. Polycarp, who has been taught by the Apostle John, wrote in 189 A.D.:

[The Church of Rome] was founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, [and] has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. With that church, because of its superior origin, all the 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.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, wrote in 251 A.D.:

If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?

*See also Catechism of the Catholic Church 551—553, 880—883, 889—892*

*All scriptural quotes are from the New American Bible, and all quotes from the Church Fathers are from the Catholic Answers tract The Authority of the Pope: Part 1.*