



# ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

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## BASIS OF THE PAPACY

- Numerous Scriptural references
  - Mission of Jesus: reveal God's love and forgiveness of sins
  - Apostolic succession refers to the line of bishops that can be traced back to St. Peter. The handing on of apostolic preaching and authority is conferred through the laying on of hands, which is referenced in the New Testament.
  - Role of the bishop: teach, sanctify and govern
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### Scriptural References to St. Peter and His Ministry

- **Matthew 16:16-19:** 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."
- **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."
- **Mark 3:16:** [he appointed the twelve:] Simon, whom he named Peter...
- **Mark 9:2:** After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them.
- **Luke 22:31-32:** "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers."
- **Luke 24:34:** ...who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!"
- **1 Corinthians 15:5:** ...that he appeared to *Cephas*, then to the Twelve.

### Why the Pope is Called...

- **Vicar of Christ:** A vicar is someone who stands in the place of another. Peter was chosen by the Lord himself to be his vicar, a responsibility transmitted to Peter's successors. He was not elected by the other Apostles to preside over the Church.
- **Holy Father/His Holiness:** reminds us that the Pope is the universal pastor of the Church, into which Christ wants to gather all the children of God into one (cf. John 11:52). The Pope's office has an objective sanctity about it, flowing from its divine institution.

## What is “The Power of the Keys”?

The “power of the keys” entrusted to Peter<sup>1</sup> by Christ represents his authority.<sup>2</sup> By virtue of his office the Pope possesses supreme, full, immediate and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely.

## Mission Jesus Entrusted to Peter and the Other Disciples

Jesus, the Son of God, had a twofold mission: to reveal the Father’s love and the forgiveness of sins. Many people who followed Jesus were called “disciples” (“learners”). Jesus appointed 12 disciples as his Apostles (“one who is sent”). The apostles were distinguished by four criteria:

- Each received a call from Christ to be an apostle
- Each received a commission from Christ to preach in his name as an apostle
- Each was an eyewitness to the public ministry of Jesus with the special feature of “dwelling with the Lord” (this criterion is suspended for the apostleship of St. Paul)
- Each was a witness to the resurrected Jesus

In appointing them, Jesus established them with a unique office in his Church. “He gave them the command to continue his own mission, saying, ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I send you’<sup>3</sup> and he promised to remain with them until the end of the world.”<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament, the office of Apostle is transmitted to the successors of the Apostles, the bishops (Matthew 28:16-20, the Great Commission).

## What is “Apostolic Succession”?

The handing on of apostolic preaching and authority from Apostles to their successors, the bishops, by the laying on of hands. “Apostolic succession is the transmission by means of the sacrament of Holy Orders of the mission and power of the Apostles to their successors... Thanks to this transmission the Church remains in communion of faith and life” through time, carrying on the mission of Christ.<sup>5</sup> There are references to Apostolic Succession in the New Testament and the earliest writings of the Fathers of the Church, including Clement of Rome’s *Epistle to the Corinthians* (about 96 A.D.) and Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to the church of Philadelphia in Asia (about 106 A.D.). The Apostolic Succession continues to the current day in the college of bishops who, as pastors, govern the Church in virtue of their unity with the head of the college, the Pope.

## What is “Papal Infallibility”?

Infallibility, which is a charism (a gift of the Holy Spirit that directly or indirectly benefits the Church),<sup>6</sup> is “a certain inability to err in believing or teaching revealed truth.”<sup>7</sup> “Infallibility is exercised when the Roman Pontiff, in virtue of his office as the Supreme Pastor of the Church, or the College of Bishops, in union with the Pope especially when joined together in an Ecumenical Council, proclaim by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals. Infallibility is also exercised when the Pope and Bishops in their ordinary Magisterium are in agreement in proposing a doctrine as definitive. Every one of the faithful must adhere to such teaching with the obedience of faith.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mt 16:19.

<sup>2</sup> *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2006) 111.

<sup>3</sup> Jn 20:21.

<sup>4</sup> *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (USCCB, 2006) 175; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Washington, DC: USCCB, 1997) 858-861.

<sup>5</sup> *Compendium* 176; cf. CCC 861-865.

<sup>6</sup> CCC Glossary.

<sup>7</sup> *The Teaching of Christ: A Catholic Catechism for Adults*, 5th edition, ed. Bishop Donald W. Wuerl, Ronald Lawler, O.F.M. Cap., Thomas Comerford Lawler, Kris D. Stubna (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2005) 191.

<sup>8</sup> *Compendium* 185; cf., CCC 891.