

THE PAPACY

Catholic Position Catholics believe that Jesus established the Church and chose Peter as the head of the apostles. The Church accepts the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) as Peter's successor and the head of all Catholics.

Protestant Position Peter was never appointed by Christ as the earthly head of the Church for the simple reason that the Church was never meant to have one. Christ is the Church's only foundation. The papacy is an institution designed to give the Catholic Church an authority it simply does not have.

Peter the Leader

Many times in the Bible that Peter is singled out as the leader of the apostles.

1. Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter, which mean "rock", "*And so I say to you, you are Peter [Rock], 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*" (Matt. 16:13-19). Peter received this power individually.
2. In Luke 22:31-32, Jesus prays that Peter's faith would not fail; Peter in turn would strengthen the other disciples. In John 21:15-17, Jesus clearly makes Peter the shepherd of His Church.
3. Peter often spoke for the rest of the apostles (Matt 19:27; Mark 8:29; Luke 12:41; John 6:69). The apostles are sometimes referred to as "*Peter and his companions*" (Luke 9:32; Mark 16:7; Acts 2:37). Peter's name always heads the list of the apostles (Matt 10:1-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13).
4. Peter is conspicuously involved in all the Church's important "firsts". Peter led the meeting which elected the first successor to an apostle (Acts 1:13-26). Peter preached the first sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14), and received the first converts (Acts 2:41). Peter performed the first miracle after Pentecost (Acts 3:6-7), inflicted the first punishment upon Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11), and excommunicated first heretic, Simon the magician (Acts 8:21). Peter is the first apostle to raise a person from the dead (Acts 9:36-41). Peter first received the revelation to admit Gentiles into the Church (Acts 10: 9-16), and commanded that the first Gentile converts be baptized (Acts 10:44-48).
5. In Acts 15, the Council of Jerusalem was called at the request of Paul to decide whether Gentiles had to follow the Law of Moses as well as the Law of Christ. It was Peter's statements that settled the doctrinal dispute and silenced the assembly of presbyters and the apostles, including James, the bishop of Jerusalem.

Apostolic Succession

Catholics believe that when Christ established His Church, He set up a living, continuing authority to teach, govern, and sanctify in His name, just like what God provided for Israel in the Mosaic priesthood (2 Chr 19:11; Mal 2:7) after His Covenant with the nation. The Church continues to need an authoritative leader to protect and shepherd Christ's flock.

Why Bishop of Rome?

Historical evidence suggests that Peter died in Rome. In his first epistle, Peter tells his readers that he is writing from "Babylon" (1 Pet. 5:13), which was a first-century code word for the city of pagan Rome. Further, the Fathers are unanimous in declaring that he went to Rome and was martyred there under the pagan emperor Nero.

- Dionysius of Corinth wrote, "You [Pope Soter] have also, by your very admonition, brought together the planting that was made by Peter and Paul at Rome and at Corinth; for both of them alike planted in our Corinth and taught us; and both alike, teaching similarly in Italy, suffered martyrdom at the same time" (Letter to Pope Soter [A.D. 170]).
- Eusebius Pamphilius gave more precise dates. He said that in 42 A.D. "the apostle Peter, after he has established the church in Antioch, is sent to Rome, where he remains as a bishop of that city, preaching the gospel for twenty-five years." He went on to say that "Nero is the first, in addition to all his other crimes, to make a persecution against the Christians, in which Peter and Paul died gloriously at Rome." (The Chronicle [A.D.303])

After Peter died, the early Church always accepted the Bishop of Rome as head of the Church. They note, as Ignatius of Antioch does, that Rome "*holds the presidency*" among the other churches, and that, as Irenaeus explains, "*because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree*" with Rome. They are also clear on the fact that it is communion with Rome and the bishop of Rome that causes one to be in communion with the Catholic Church. This displays a recognition that, as Cyprian of Carthage puts it, Rome is "*the principal church, in which sacerdotal unity has its source.*"

- In about 80 A.D., the Church at Corinth deposed its lawful leaders. The fourth bishop of Rome, Pope Clement I, was called to settle the matter even though John the Apostle was still alive in Ephesus, which was much closer to Corinth than was Rome. (First Letter to the Corinthians [A.D. 80])
- "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" (Letter to the Romans [A.D. 110]).

For 250 years the Roman Emperors tried to destroy Christianity through persecution. In the first 200 years of Christianity, every Pope but one was martyred. A Roman Emperor's greatest fear was a rival to the throne. Nevertheless, after executing Pope Fabian, the emperor Decius (249-251 A.D.), one of the harshest persecutors of the early Church, made the following remark, "I would far rather receive news of a rival to the throne than of another bishop of Rome." The Romans certainly knew who the head of the Church was.

READING

Peter the Rock (*Catholic Answers*)

The False Decretals (*This Rock, October 1998*)

Further Research

- At Cesarea Phillipi (Matt 16:13), there is a massive rock plateau approximately 200 feet high by 500 feet long. What does this geographical background suggest about the stability of the Church Jesus founded on Peter?
- What does "the keys" (Matt 16:19) symbolize as in the Old Testament (Is 22:19-22)?
- What are some good and bad popes? What role did they play in different stages of church history?
- Practically, do Catholics need a pope? Why?