



## **The One True Church** **(Part I)** **by Joe Sixpack**

Last week, we began our examination of how Christ founded the Catholic Church. This week, we are going to take it a step farther...perhaps several steps farther.

The most telling point about the divine origins of the Church is the papacy. Non-Catholics—particularly those who are not exactly friends of the Catholic Church—all tell us there is nothing in the Bible about the papacy or St. Peter being the first pope. That could not be further from the truth.

Biblical evidence for the papacy is overwhelming. Following the logical presentation of Karl Keating in his modern classical work *Catholicism and Fundamentalism*, we find the evidence to be irrefutable.

Keating notes first that St. Peter was almost always named first in the Gospels' listings of the Apostles (Mt. 10:1-4; Mk. 3:16-19; Lk. 6:14-16; Ac. 1:13), and that sometimes the Apostles were referred to only as "Peter and those who were with him" (Lk. 9: 32). He points out that St. Peter was the first of the Apostles to preach, the first to perform a healing miracle, and the one to whom the revelation came that Christianity was for Gentiles as well as Jews (Ac. 2:14-40; 3:6; 10:46-48).

Keating goes on to tell us that "Peter's preeminent position among the apostles was symbolized at the very beginning of his relationship to Christ, although the implications were only slowly unfolded. At their first meeting, Christ told Simon that his name would thereafter be Peter, which translates as Rock (John 1:42). The startling thing was that in the Old Testament only God was called a rock. The word was never used as a proper name for a man. If one were to turn to a companion and say, 'From now on your name is Asparagus', people would wonder. Why Asparagus? What is the meaning of it? Indeed, why Peter for Simon the fisherman? Why give him as a name a word only used for God before this moment?

"Christ was not given to meaningless gestures, and neither were the Jews as a whole when it came to names. Giving a new name meant that the status of the person was changed, as when Abram was changed to Abraham (Gn. 17:5); Jacob to Israel (Gn. 32:28); Elicot, to Joakim (2Kg. 23:34); and Daniel, Ananias, Misael, and Azarias to Baltassar, Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago (Dn. 1:6-8). But no Jew had ever been called Rock because that was reserved for God. The Jews would give other names taken from nature, such as Barach (which means lightning; Jos 19:45), Deborah (bee; Gn. 29:16), and Rachel (ewe; Gn. 29:16), but not Rock. In the New Testament James and John were surnamed Boanerges, Sons of Thunder, by Christ (Mk. 3-17), but

that was never regularly used in place of their original names. Simon's new name supplanted the old" (pgs. 205-206).

St. Peter's name has been firmly established by Christ as a name synonymous with God. Throughout Jesus and St. Peter's relationship the reason became gradually clearer, but it becomes crystal clear in Matthew. Immediately after St. Peter proclaims Christ's divinity, our Lord says, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (16:17-19).

This passage seems obvious to most readers. The verse could have been rewritten as: "You are Rock and on this rock I will build my church." It makes perfect sense that Jesus is here giving St. Peter supreme authority; however, those who desire to debunk the papacy, and the divine authority it possesses, prefer to claim the rock refers to Christ instead of Peter.

Grammatical rules tell us that the phrase "this rock" must relate to the closes noun. Peter's profession of faith that Jesus is the Christ is *two verses* earlier, while Peter's name is in the immediately proceeding *clause*. Analogously, consider this artificial sentence: "I have a shirt and a coat and it is blue." Which is blue? The coat, because that is the noun closest to the pronoun "it". Obviously, then, the word "rock" must mean Peter—"You are Peter (Rock) and on this rock I will build my church."

Not only is the reference to rock clear, but we see also that Jesus is giving St. Peter more authority than God had ever given any man, along with some specific promises. Immediately after stating that He will build the Church upon St. Peter, Jesus goes on to make an astounding promise, along with an even more astounding reason for doing so.

The promise is, the gates of hell will not defeat the Church built on St. Peter. This is a promise that the Church will not be destroyed by Christ's enemies, and that she will stand until the end of time. Only a divine institution could have such a promise as that. Think about it. There is not one single nation on the face of the planet existing today that existed then; all have either been overthrown and completely remade, or they are destroyed. Many antichrists have come and gone. The Roman Empire tried to destroy the Catholic Church. So did Atilla the Hun, Kahn, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, and even the United Nations tries today. Yet Holy Mother Church is still youthful and thriving, while all her enemies become dust and ashes.

Using the symbol of the keys, Jesus then gives Peter his authority. That symbol is not lost on us today. Dignitaries receive the keys to the city. Business owners possess the keys to their business and the authority to run it. You have keys to your car, and no one else has the authority to drive it without those keys. It's obvious, then, that Jesus is giving divine authority to Peter when He gives him the keys to the kingdom of heaven.

This is immediately followed by the power of binding and loosing. "Binding and loosing" among the rabbis of Our Lord's time meant to declare something "prohibited" or "permitted". Here it plainly means that St. Peter, the Steward of the Lord's house, the Church, has all the rights and powers of a divinely appointed steward. He does not, like the Jewish rabbis, declare probable, speculative opinions, but he has the right to teach and govern authoritatively, with the certainty of God's approval "in heaven". A law giving power is certainly implied by these words.

We will continue with this discussion in our next installment of "What We Believe...Why We Believe It".

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