

## Jesus Established Leadership for the Church

Catholics may be asked "where in the Bible do you find the papacy?" The answer is simple and complex at the same time. It is complex because you have to understand the context of what our Lord is saying. It is simple because it is found in Matthew, 16:13-19: "When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"

This location was outside the Jewish territories. It was a pagan area. It was had a notable geographic feature: a huge rock. From this rock flows water that feeds into the Sea of Galilee, which feeds the Jordan River. It was at this location that the Apostles answered the question: "They replied, 'Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'" 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."

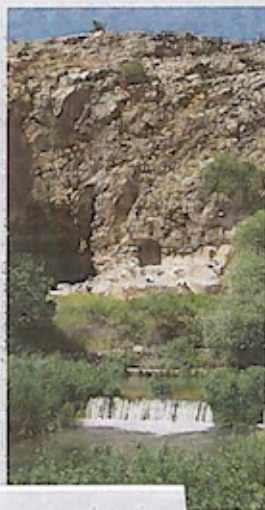
There is the dual statement of Jesus as the Christ and the Son of the living God. When the Christ responds He refers to Simon as the son of Jonah. He affirms Peter's statement of Jesus as the Son of God by stating that this revelation came from His heavenly father.

St. John Chrysostom says that the text now focuses on Simon "to inform you that Peter did indeed speak, but the Father suggested, and that you might believe the saying to be no longer a human opinion but a divine doctrine." It is better to have this expression of faith then followed by a proclamation by Jesus. "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."

There is a play on words in the Greek text (*petros* and *petra*); the word for "rock" and "Peter" is the same. Our Lord is saying: "You are Rock and upon this rock, I will build my Church." This is why the location is important. It is from the rock of Peter that the living water will flow.

"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."

There are times when scripture uses the same metaphor in different ways. Christ is our foundation. As we can see in the Old Testament, the story of Joseph comes to mind, in the Jewish apostles. "Could we find another like him," Pharaoh asked his servants, "a man so endowed with the spirit of God?" So



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Pharaoh said to Joseph: "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are." (Genesis 41: 38-39) A person who is endowed with the spirit of God who can make revelations is both Joseph and Peter. When this becomes known, they are no longer the same person they were once. "Pharaoh also bestowed the name of Zaphenath-paneah on Joseph. (45)" As in the story of Joseph, Peter is given authority. He is given the keys. And Joseph "You shall be in charge of my household, and all my people will obey your command. Only in respect to the throne will I outrank you. (40)" A change of name is a sign of this transformation. Our Lord confers the name Peter upon Simon. The only one who outranks Peter is Jesus. Like Joseph, Peter stands in the place of the Christ. St. Cyprian in his treatise on Unity of the Church writes: "And again to the same He says, after His resurrection, 'Feed my sheep'. And although to all

the apostles, after His resurrection, He gives an equal power, and says, 'As the Father has sent me, even so I send you: Receive the Holy Spirit: Whose soever sins you remit, they shall be remitted unto him; and whose soever sins you retain, they shall be retained'; John 20: 21 yet, that He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one. Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity." This commentary acknowledges that there is a focal point for unity found in an Eastern Christian phrase: "first among equals" from which the unity flows. This is also the basis for the understanding of collegiality. All bishops have the same power, which is why bishops in unity can create new bishops. In both cases authority has its origin at Christ.

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