

- “*YOU are rock, and on this rock I will build my Church. I will give you, Peter, the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. What you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven...*”
- These words of Jesus are addressed to Peter alone...and thus this Gospel is probably the strongest Biblical basis for our belief in the office of Peter—the pope—being head of the early Church...for Jesus designates him directly.
- And this passage is not the only reason we believe in the primacy of Peter; there are many others:
 - Peter is named first in all the lists of the apostles.
 - It is from the boat of Peter that Jesus teaches the crowd. (Luke 5).
 - It is Peter whom Jesus commands to let down his nets...and by doing so hauls in the catch.
 - It is he whom Jesus commands to feed His sheep in John 21.
 - It is he specifically whom Jesus prays for in Luke 22, and who is told to strengthen the faith of his brethren...his fellow apostles.
 - He is the one who steps forward as leader after Jesus’ Ascension...both before and after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
 - And it is Peter that Paul seeks out after Paul’s own conversion.
- Always Jesus has Peter by His side, even in the special events of the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden.
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- And we believe that this office of leadership continues after Peter by the same basis that the apostles elected Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:20—“*His office let another take.*”
- And this makes sense; God’s people has always been governed through hierarchical leadership.
- We see the continuation of divinely-established authority when:

- Joshua takes Moses' place after Moses died;
- In the line of the kings of Israel and Judah;
- In Elisha taking the place of Elijah after Elijah was taken to Heaven;
- And perhaps most concretely in the line of the Jewish high priests, his assistant priests, and the Levites...which reflects our Church's organization of bishops, priests and deacons... the pope being the head of the bishops as Peter was head of the apostles.
- All of these took on the authority of the officeholder before him...just as a new pope takes on the authority of Peter.
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- Now one thing you may hear from our non-Catholic Christian brethren is: "Well...Jesus meant that Simon Peter's statement of faith was the rock on which He would build His Church, not Peter himself; we need no other leader but Jesus!"
- One wonders, then, why Jesus changes Simon's name to "Peter"—a derivation of the Greek word "petra", meaning "rock"...or, actually, in the Aramaic language which Jesus would have spoken: "Cephas", meaning rock...a name which we see several times in scripture.
- And, why would Jesus give Peter specifically the power of binding and loosing?
- And... who would be the authority to judge the case in the case of a theological dispute...of which there are many?
- God knows us fickle humans...and so He provides for answering the questions which inevitably arise.
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- Secondly, we see that by this office of leadership that we are responsible to that authority God has established, and to the authority of the Church as a whole.

- Jesus told all the apostles: *“He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me”* (Luke 10:16), and also *“...if they kept my word, they will keep yours also.”* (John 15:20)
- After all, the scribes and the Pharisees fought against Jesus...and even so, Jesus still taught the people: *“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; so practice and observe whatever they tell you...”* (Matt 23:2-3). In other words, follow the authority established by God.
- And if Jesus commands the people to follow these men who actively worked against Him, how much more so should WE obey our leaders who are *faithful* to Him?
- As it says in the letter to the Hebrews: *“Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account.”* (Heb 13:17)
- And Jesus Himself speaks of the absolute authority of the Church, when He says: *“If [the sinner] refuses to listen to [his brethren], tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector...”* ...avoid him as one who rejects the Spirit of God.
- ...and then He repeats those words of authority again to the apostles: *“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* (Matt 18:17-18)
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- The Church has that promise of Jesus Himself that she will have His guidance until His coming: *“...make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”* (Matt 28:19-20).
Need we more reason to follow the Church faithfully?
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- Now our modern day...with the rise of democracy and the demise of kings and queens and emperors, we just don't like authority... especially we Americans.
- But the Church's organization and authority has developed over these 2000 years with the Spirit of God leading it.
- And with all that of God's Word affirming the authority of our Church, one can't help but wonder why an individual would believe that he know better than she...the Church which has contemplated God's Word in minute detail and guided the faithful for 2000 years...with some of the most brilliant minds in history... especially when we know that we as individuals are so influenced by the confusing (and confused) voices of the world.
- As St. Peter tells us: “...*you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation...*” (2 Peter 1:20 RSV).
- We should have the humility as did the Ethiopian eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles who, when the apostle Philip asks him if he understands the scripture, says: “‘*How can I, unless someone guides me?*’ And he invited Philip [the Church] to come up and sit with him.” (Act 8:31 RSV)
- This is why God gives us the Church as our guide...the rock upon which we are to build...for her only purpose and hope is fidelity to Christ and the salvation of souls.
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- And what does she teach us? Simply to love God and love our neighbor. To do what is right as God has taught us. To be kind and generous to others. To support the Church so that she may teach others to love God and neighbor. In other words, to do what is right according to God's Word.
- As the prophet Micah says: “*He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*” (Micah 6:8)

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- By trusting the Church and her teachings, you trust in God Himself...for it is the Spirit who leads her.
- The Church's authority to bind and loose is really a great freedom for us...for what she teaches is what is bound for us in Heaven. We need only trust in her and follow her...remembering Jesus promise: *"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..."* (John 16:13)
- This is not a promise to individuals, but rather to the Church as a whole. Thus, how can we as individuals think we know better?
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- And so...when tempted away from the Church by sin and rebellion against her, say with Jesus: *"Begone, Satan!...for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"* (Matt 4:10)
- ...and add also: *"I will follow the Church which He established and upholds and guides...and which guides ME on that way to everlasting life with Him."*
- Proclaim to the world those words of Joshua: *"Choose this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."* (Joshua 24:15)

Reading 1

[Is 22:19-23](#)

Thus says the LORD to Shebna, master of the palace:

“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 Hilkiah;
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 Eliakim’s shoulder;
when he opens, no one shall shut
when he shuts, no one shall open.

I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot,
to be a place of honor for his family.”

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 6, 8](#)

R. (8bc) Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.
I will give thanks to you, O LORD, with all my heart,
for you have heard the words of my mouth;
in the presence of the angels I will sing your praise;
I will worship at your holy temple.

R. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.
I will give thanks to your name,
because of your kindness and your truth:
When I called, you answered me;
you built up strength within me.

R. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.
The LORD is exalted, yet the lowly he sees,
and the proud he knows from afar.
Your kindness, O LORD, endures forever;
forsake not the work of your hands.

R. Lord, your love is eternal; do not forsake the work of your hands.

Reading II

[Rom 11:33-36](#)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!

How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!

*For who has known the mind of the Lord
or who has been his counselor?*

*Or who has given the Lord anything
that he may be repaid?*

For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be glory forever. Amen.

Gospel

[Mt 16:13-20](#)

Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi and
he asked his disciples,

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

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 Christ, 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.”

Then he strictly ordered his disciples
to tell no one that he was the Christ.