

- “*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...*”
- Jesus addresses Peter specifically...and so this Gospel is probably the strongest Biblical basis for our belief in the office of Peter being head of the early Church...for Jesus designates him directly.
- Other reasons we believe Peter is head of the Church?
 - He is named first in every list of the apostles.
 - Jesus commands him to feed His sheep in John 21.
 - Jesus prays for Peter specifically in Luke 22, telling him to strengthen the faith of his brethren...his fellow apostles and, by extension, the whole Church.
 - And it is Peter who steps forward as leader of believers after Jesus’ Ascension...before and after the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
 - ...and there several other incidents in the Gospels indicating the priority of Peter among the apostles.
- Jesus always had Peter by His side...even in the special times of the Transfiguration and the Agony in the Garden.
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- This office of leadership continued after Peter by the same basis that the apostles elected Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot—“*His office let another take.*” (Acts 1:20)
- ...and this makes sense; God’s people have always been governed in religious matters through hierarchical leadership.
- Moses was leader during the Exodus, and then God established the high priesthood in Moses’ brother Aaron—a priesthood which continued to the time of Jesus Himself...which, notably, ended soon after Jesus’ Ascension with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D...and never re-erected.
- The Jewish high priests, his assistant priests, and the Levites are reflected in today’s Church by bishops, priests and deacons...with

the pope—the Bishop of Rome—being head of the bishops as Peter was head of the apostles.

- Jesus gives Peter specifically the power of binding and loosing so as to provide a final authority in the case of theological questions which inevitably arise.

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- This is why Jesus changes Simon’s name to “Peter”—from the Greek word meaning “rock”...but, actually, in the Aramaic which Jesus and the apostles would have spoken: “Cephas”, also meaning rock...a name which we see several times in the NT.
 - ...as Jesus Himself says in John’s Gospel: “*‘So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas’ (which means Peter).*” (John 1:42)

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- Jesus also told the apostles as a body: “*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)
 - The Pharisees fought against Jesus...and yet Jesus still taught the people: “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat [the established position of religious authority]; so practice and observe whatever they tell you...*” (Matthew 23:2-3).
 - So if Jesus commands the people to follow these Pharisees who actively worked against Him, how much more so should WE comply with our leaders who are faithful to Him?
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 - Thus, because of Peter’s continuing leadership in the papacy, we are bound to observe this authority God has established, and the authority of the Church as a whole...remembering 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.*” (Hebrews 13:17)
 - And Jesus Himself speaks of the authority of the Church, when He says: “*If [the sinner]...refuses to listen even to the church, let him*

be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector...” (Matthew 18:17) In other words, that person is rejecting the Spirit of God.

- ...for the Church has the promise of Jesus Himself that she will have His guidance until His second coming, as He says at the end of the Gospel Matthew: “*...make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you... I am with you always, to the close of the age.*” (Matthew 28:19-20)

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- Of course, not every utterance of the pope and/or bishops is infallibly correct; there are very specific conditions required for the pope and the body of bishops of the world can claim a teaching as given infallibly by the Holy Spirit.
 - In fact, popes have declared only two such teachings in the last 170 years or so—the dogma of Mary’s Immaculate Conception in the 1854, and of her Assumption in 1950.
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 - But neither does this mean we pick and choose the teachings of the pope and bishops. By their very office, they are given the assistance of the Holy Spirit...and, after all, they have spent their lives studying and teaching God’s Word. Why would we as individuals think we know better?
 - We must also remember that many of the Church’s teachings are worked out over time, even over hundreds of years...like those teachings of Mary’s Immaculate Conception and Assumption were just recently declared as infallible doctrine.
 - So...it is best to see how things work out over time, trusting in Christ’s promise to be with His Church always... remembering St. Paul from our second reading today: “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!*”
 - For we recognize that, as individuals, we are often very heavily influenced by the confusing (and confused) voices of the world.

- ...reminding us of the Ethiopian in the Acts of the Apostles who, when asked by the apostle Philip whether he understood scripture, said: “*‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip [the Church] to come up and sit with him.*” (Act 8:31)
- This is why God gives us the Church as our guide. Her only purpose and desire being fidelity to Christ and the salvation of souls.
- And, really, this is a relief for us; we need not agonize over decisions pertaining to faith, but rather be comforted in knowing that our assent to the Church’s doctrinal teaching is the desire of God Himself...remembering Jesus’ words to the apostles—the Church: “*When the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will guide you into all the truth...*” (John 16:13)...a promise not to individuals, but to the Church as a whole.
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- St. Paul describes “*...the church of the living God*” as “*the pillar and bulwark of the truth,*” (1 Timothy 3:15), and that “*...through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known...*” (Ephesians 3:10)
- Thus, when tempted away from the Church and her teaching, repeat Jesus’ words at His own temptation in the desert: “*Begone, Satan!...for it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’*” (Matthew 4:10)
- ...claiming those words of Joshua as your own: “*...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.