

PETER'S PROCLAMATION AND HIS GIFT OF INFALLIBILITY

I dedicate this homily to Pope Benedict XVI, with praise and gratitude for his decision to beatify Cardinal John Henry Newman.

To test the perspective of the Apostles as to His identity, Jesus inquired, "And who do you say that I am?" Only Simon responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" Knowing his response was prompted by His Father, Jesus first changed his name from Simon son of John to Peter, "The Rock." He then commissioned him to serve as the leader of the Apostles and rock foundation for His new Church. From that moment on Peter and his successors refer to themselves in the plural "We" - forever uniting themselves with Christ in all that they say and do.

Throughout Sacred Scripture, we read that God doesn't commission a person to perform a particular ministry without first giving him the necessary tools, or capacity to perform it! In this instance, Peter was formally commissioned by Jesus to lead His Church, with the added responsibility of sanctifying His people, preserving His teachings, and proclaiming the "Good News" of humanity's salvation.

To assist him in the performance of this awesome responsibility, Peter also had to be given the authority and capacity to speak in Jesus' name. This he received, when Jesus added, "And I will give you the keys of 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." If Peter's commission was to bring salvation, in Jesus' name to all mankind, it stands to reason that he had to be given the requisite authority to prescribe, in a binding fashion, what behavior would be morally acceptable, and what would not! The keys to the kingdom symbolized Peter's authority to either forgive humanity's misconduct, or to withhold forgiveness. Thus, Peter was given the gift of infallibility in important issues of faith and morals, to teach without fear of error, as evidenced by the power

to "bind or Loose." As a guarantee of this commitment, Jesus also promised to be with him and his successors, by the power of the Holy Spirit, until the end of time.

And yet, so many people in today's world, coming from a purely earthly perspective, insist that no man can speak infallibly, because of his limited and imperfect nature. So many, maintaining a secular, worldly agenda seriously question the Pope's authority to speak infallibly, even in the name of Christ! At the same time they also criticize our doctrines as being antiquated, out of touch with modern worldly realities. And in their self-willed sense of intellectual supremacy, they seek to change and conform the Son of God's teachings to suit themselves, advancing their own worldly agenda. In fact, they say, "You may believe anything you wish, even if it is erroneous!" They even go further, by redefining what is good and evil to suit themselves in the manner of Adam and Eve. Imagine, man seeking to refashion Almighty God after man's own image! Hence the need for the Pope to be given the capacity to speak unerringly in the name of Christ regarding issues affecting mankind's salvation.

Jesus' vicar must therefore speak clearly for our understanding. He must speak the truth with one voice in Christ on all of these critical life and death issues for humanity's sake. And his message of life must, to that extent be unequivocal and infallible! For when the Pope speaks, it is Christ Himself who is speaking to us, shepherding His Church by the Light of all truth. Why then is it so surprising that Peter and his successors be given the authority and power to speak unerringly on issues effecting mankind's salvation?

May God bless you all