

Significance of Rome, the See of Peter, in the Early Church

by Fr. Roger J. Landry

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I. Prayer

John 21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

II. Introduction

A. This passage from John summarizes the main elements of the lecture:

- 1) Peter's death and its importance. Peter followed all the way until his own death in imitation of the Lord.
- 2) He was drawn to a place he didn't want to go and stretched out his hands, a Greek expression for crucifixion (ejktenei" ta;" cei'rav" sou). He was drawn and dragged ultimately here to Rome, to a circus formerly astride what is now the basilica of St. Peter.
- 3) Peter's love for the Lord is evident, as is the Lord's for Peter.
- 4) We see the Lord's commission for Peter, Kephias, to feed and tend his lambs and sheep, to be the shepherd of his sheep. This is the image we see at the back of the Chair of Peter in St. Peter's Basilica.
- 5) This shepherding is done in love, in the context of the commission, "Peter, do you love me?"

B. The Lecture will be structured in the following way:

- 1) Founding of the Church in Rome by Peter and Paul
 - a) Their deaths and burial
 - b) Their importance in the Church, as Rock and Doctor of the Gentiles.
 - c) Their existence and work in Rome
 - d) The meaning of the transition of the "center" of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome
- 2) Reflection on the meaning of Rome's role in the Early Church
 - a) Solicitude for the churches
 - b) Presiding in charity and unity
 - c) The Rule of faith in Apostolic Succession against Heresies
 - d) Rome as the location of the Successor of St. Peter. Peter still speaks.

C. Methodological considerations

- 1) For the sake of time, this presentation will be more *synthetic* than *diachronic*.
 - a) In other words, we will cover the material in an organized way according to running themes in the early Church, rather than going decade by decade through time.

- b) The former allows us to see the main points more clearly, though the latter has the advantage of letting us see the “development” in the consciousness of the early Church led by the Holy Spirit.
 - c) Within the thematic points, however, we will try to go diachronically so that we can glimpse the development.
- 2) We will rely heavily on the early “Fathers of the Church,” the early bishops and theologians in the first few centuries after Christ. Many of their writings were saved and copied and are invaluable to us in our reconstruction of the situation of the early Church.
- a) These give us not only an historical read on the situation in the early Church;
 - b) But most of them also give us an authoritative read on the situation. They were the leaders of the Church entrusted with passing along the doctrine they had received... some of them directly from the apostles.
 - c) There will be some holes, necessarily, because most of their works were written to respond to particular needs in the early Church, and not to provide a complete historical record for those, like us, coming centuries later. We will need to do some educated guess work in places to fill in the gaps.
- 3) To understand the importance of these early sources to the Catholic faith, it is necessary first to recognize that the Catholic Church believes in a deposit of faith and in the development of doctrine.
- a) Deposit of Faith
 - 1) This is ultimately what Christ handed onto the apostles and the apostles handed on to their successors whom they established by the laying on of hands in the various parts of the world.
 - 2) There are two “parts” of the one deposit of faith, oral and written.
 - a) Initially the deposit of faith was oral (except for what writings came from Judaism).
 - b) Later much of the Christian deposit of faith was written down in the form of letters (like St. Paul’s, St. John’s, St. James’) and books of the Gospels.
 - c) The “oral tradition” (what was not written down) included things like the structure of the established communities, the ways they prayed together, their acts of charity as well as doctrinal points that were simply not put into writing. We can see the notion of this oral tradition, for example, in the writings of St. Irenaeus from c. 198 (*Against Heresies*, 3:2:2:) But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches, they [heretics] object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth. For [they maintain] that the apostles intermingled the things of the law with the words of the Saviour; and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord Himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma, but that they themselves, indubitably, unsulliedly, and purely, have knowledge of the hidden mystery: this is, indeed, to blaspheme their Creator after a most impudent manner! It comes to this, therefore, that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition.
 - 3) Both the written traditions and the oral traditions were passed along to successors, and the Church treasures both as coming from the same source (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶¶ 75-82).
 - 4) The deposit of faith is generally regarded to have “closed” with the death of the last apostle.
 - b) Development of Doctrine
 - 1) This is the belief that the Holy Spirit, over time, will help the Church more greatly appreciate the contents of the deposit of faith.

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

John 15:26 “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. 27 You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.
 - 2) This is a process of making more explicit what is implicit in the faith that has been passed on.

- a) In other words, there is a gradual appreciation of some of the elements of the faith that has been passed on.
 - b) This appreciation recognizes within the deposit of faith something the significance of which those before had not yet noticed.
 - c) Oftentimes this recognition came as a result of heresies or disagreements about the faith.
 - d) For example, we can examine the notion of God as a Trinity.
 - 1) The term didn't exist in the early Church (used first by Tertullian c. 200, a combination of *trinus* and *unitas*).
 - 2) There was a notion of three persons, one God, but how they came together, and what the relationships were among the three persons, was not realized at the beginning.
 - 3) But what was later learned and formulated was part of the original deposit (because the Trinity obviously is part of the original deposit of faith!); it wasn't "invented" later, just seen.
- 4) The Catholic Church also believes in what is called the Apostolic Succession through the Sacrament of Holy Orders.
- a) This means that the Holy Spirit ordains men to the ministry and gives them certain charisms and powers to carry out their ministry.
 - b) This ordination occurs through the laying on of hands and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (with the proper intention of the bishop to ordain the men in question).
 - c) The New Testament has several references to ordinations by the laying on of hands:

Acts 6:3 Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, 4 while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." 5 What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

1Tim. 4:14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. 15 Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.

2Tim. 1:6 For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; 7 for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

- d) Without getting into all of the details of Holy Orders, one of the most important tasks of the bishop, from the very beginning, has been to preach, protect and pass on the faith he too received.
 - 1) Just as St. Paul wrote:

1Cor. 15:3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.
 - 2) Pope Sixtus III (432-441) wrote similarly:

The blessed apostle Peter has handed on in his successors what he has received (Acta Conc. Oec, I,2, p. 109))
- e) So Catholics believe bishops not only have the duty to pass on the faith unchanged in substance, but have and rely on the help of the Holy Spirit to do it so that their human weaknesses and frailties do not affect the transmission of the faith. This faith in the Holy Spirit's action is particularly focused on the successor of St. Peter.
- f) There is an orderly succession of bishops which is also very important for preserving the faith. We can see this clearly in the letter of Pope St. Clement (c. 92-101), writing to the Church of Corinth to intervene in a dispute there in which they had tried to dismiss their priests (44:1):

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure [from this world]; for they have no fear lest any one deprive them of the place now appointed them. But we see that ye have removed some men of excellent behaviour from the ministry, which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honour.

III. Founding of the Church in Rome by Peter and Paul

A. Their deaths and burial

- 1) Tacitus (c. 90 AD) did not mention Peter's name specifically in his account of the torturing and killing of the Christians in Rome under Nero (64 AD), but it is almost certain that Peter died on the same day during the events Tacitus describes (because Peter was buried right next to the area of the former circus). That Peter was one of the crucifixion victims mentioned is attested to be later sources and was foretold by the Lord. This is an amazing description of just how much our Christian predecessors here in Rome suffered for the faith (Annales 15:44):

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

- 2) St. Clement, 4th Pope (c. 92-101, *Letter to the Corinthians*, 5:1-6:1) describes the deaths of Peter and Paul of which he was likely an eyewitness or close observer. He calls them "spiritual heroes":

But not to dwell upon ancient examples, let us come to the most recent spiritual heroes. Let us take the noble examples furnished in our own generation. Through envy and jealousy, the greatest and most righteous pillars[of the Church] have been persecuted and put to death. Let us set before our eyes the illustrious apostles, Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him. Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience. To these men who spent their lives in the practice of holiness, there is to be added a great multitude of the elect, who, having through envy endured many indignities and tortures, furnished us with a most excellent example. Through envy, those women, the Danaids and Dircae, being persecuted, after they had suffered terrible and unspeakable torments, finished the course of their faith with steadfastness, and though weak in body, received a noble reward. Envy has alienated wives from their husbands, and changed that saying of our father Adam, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." Envy and strife have overthrown great cities and rooted up mighty nations.

- 3) Gaius, a priest of Rome, writing during the Pontificate of St. Zephyrinus (198-217), against the Montanist Proclus describes the location of their two tombs or victory monuments (which are still now directly

underneath the respective altars of the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul). This is preserved for us in Eusebius' *History of the Church*, 2:25.

The Persecution under Nero in which Paul and Peter were honored at Rome with Martyrdom in Behalf of Religion. WHEN the government of Nero was now firmly established, he began to plunge into unholy pursuits, and armed himself even against the religion of the God of the universe. To describe the greatness of his depravity does not lie within the plan of the present work. As there are many indeed that have recorded his history in most accurate narratives, every one may at his pleasure learn from them the coarseness of the man's extraordinary madness, under the influence of which, after he had accomplished the destruction of so many myriads without any reason, he ran into such blood-guiltiness that he did not spare even his nearest relatives and dearest friends, but destroyed his mother and his brothers and his wife, with very many others of his own family as he would private and public enemies, with various kinds of deaths. But with all these things this particular in the catalogue of his crimes was still wanting, that he was the first of the emperors who showed himself an enemy of the divine religion. The Roman Tertullian is likewise a witness of this. He writes as follows: "Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine, particularly then when after subduing all the east, he exercised his cruelty against all at Rome. We glory in having such a man the leader in our punishment. For whoever knows him can understand that nothing was condemned by Nero unless it was something of great excellence." Thus publicly announcing himself as the first among God's chief enemies, he was led on to the slaughter of the apostles. It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day. It is confirmed likewise by Caius, a member of the Church, who arose under Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome. He, in a published disputation with Proclus, the leader of the Phrygian heresy, speaks as follows concerning the places where the sacred corpses of the aforesaid apostles are laid: "BUT I CAN SHOW THE TROPHIES OF THE APOSTLES. FOR IF YOU WILL GO TO THE VATICAN OR TO THE OSTIAN WAY, [YOU WILL FIND THE TROPHIES OF THOSE WHO LAID THE FOUNDATIONS OF THIS CHURCH."

- 4) Dionysius of Corinth (c. 166-174), a contemporary of Pope St. Soter (166-174), mentions their martyrdom (likewise preserved for us in the same source of Eusebius) and that this death was a "planting" of the seeds of faith, of their teaching, here in Rome (and likewise in Corinth). As Tertullian would say elsewhere later, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

And that they both suffered martyrdom at the same time is stated by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in his epistle to the Romans, in the following words: "You have thus by such an admonition bound together the planting of Peter and of Paul at Rome and Corinth. For both of them planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time." I have quoted these things in order that the truth of the history might be still more confirmed.

- 5) Tertullian (c. 200), in his *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 36:1, adds that they poured forth their doctrine with their blood:

Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each of them severally. Achaia is very near you, (in which) you find Corinth. Since you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi; (and there too) you have the Thessalonians. Since you are able to cross to Asia, you get Ephesus. Since, moreover, you are close upon Italy, you have Rome, from which there comes even into our own hands the very authority (of apostles themselves). How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! where Peter endures a passion like his Lord's! where Paul wins his crown in a death like John's where the Apostle John was first plunged, unhurt, into boiling oil, and thence remitted to his island-exile!

- 6) Tertullian (207-212), in his *Against Marcion*, 4:5:1, reiterates the point that they sealed the Gospel they bequeathed with their own blood:

On the whole, then, if that is evidently more true which is earlier, if that is earlier which is from the very beginning, if that is from the beginning which has the apostles for its authors, then it will certainly be quite as evident, that that comes down from the apostles, which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles. Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule of faith the Galatians were brought for correction; what the Philippians, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians read by it; what utterance also the Romans give, so very near (to the apostles), to whom Peter and Paul conjointly bequeathed the gospel even sealed with their own blood.

- 7) Tertullian (211-212), in his *Against Scorpion* 15:3, mentions Peter's death by crucifixion and Paul's by beheading. He also makes reference to Peter's death fulfilling the prophecy of the Lord in John 21:18:

And yet, that the apostles endured such sufferings, we know: the teaching is clear. This only I perceive in running through the Acts. I am not at all on the search. The prisons there, and the bonds, and the scourges, and the big stones, and the swords, and the onsets by the Jews, and the assemblies of the heathen, and the indictments by tribunes, and the hearing of causes by kings, and the judgment-seats of proconsuls and the name of Caesar, do not need an interpreter. That Peter is struck, that Stephen is overwhelmed by stones,^[4] that James is slain as is a victim at the altar, that Paul is beheaded has been written in their own blood. And if a heretic wishes his confidence to rest upon a public record, the archives of the empire will speak, as would the stones of Jerusalem. We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. Then is Peter girt by another, when he is made fast to the cross. Then does Paul obtain a birth suited to Roman citizenship, when in Rome he springs to life again ennobled by martyrdom. Wherever I read of these occurrences so soon as I do so, I learn to suffer; nor does it signify to me which I follow as teachers of martyrdom, whether the declarations or the deaths of the apostles, save that in their deaths I recall their declarations also.

- 8) Origen (d. 254), repeated in Eusebius, *Church History*, 3:1:2, describes Peter's upside-down crucifixion — because he did not consider himself worthy to be crucified right-side-up as the Lord was outside the walls of Jerusalem — as well as the selection of Linus as Peter's successor. :

Parts of the World in which the Apostles preached Christ: Such was the condition of the Jews. Meanwhile the holy apostles and disciples of our Saviour were dispersed throughout the world. Parthia, according to tradition, was allotted to Thomas as his field of labor, Scythia to Andrew, and Asia to John, who, after he had lived some time there, died at Ephesus. Peter appears to have preached 6 in 2 Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia to the Jews of the dispersion. And at last, having come to Rome, he was crucified head-downwards; for he had requested that he might suffer in this way. What do we need to say concerning Paul, who preached the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyricum, and afterwards suffered martyrdom in Rome under Nero These facts are related by Origen in the third volume of his Commentary on Genesis. The First Ruler of the Church of Rome: After the martyrdom of Paul and of Peter, Linus[1] was the first to obtain the episcopate of the church at Rome. Paul mentions him, when writing to Timothy from Rome, in the salutation at the end of the epistle.

(2Tim. 4:21 Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.)

- 9) Peter of Alexandria (c. 311), in his *Canonical Letter*, canon 9, likewise mentions their sufferings and specifies their deaths:

Peter, the first chosen of the Apostles, having been apprehended often and thrown into prison and treated with ignominy, at last was crucified in Rome. And the reknowned Paul, oftentimes having been delivered up and put in peril of death, having endured many evils, and boasting of his numerous persecutions and afflictions, was even himself put to the sword and beheaded in the same city.

- 10) Lactantius (316-320), a convert, in his *Deaths of the Persecutors*, 2:5, links their deaths to Christ's crucifixion (the date of which he gives as March 23, which is different than the April 7, 30 AD that most scholars today agree on). He says, unlike Eusebius his contemporary, that Peter came to Rome during the reign of Nero (54-68) and not in the year 42. He describes Peter's working miracles and bringing many to conversion:

In the latter days of the Emperor Tiberius, in the consulship of Ruberius Geminus and Fufius Geminus, and on the tenth of the kalends of April, as I find it written, Jesus Christ was crucified by the Jews. After He had risen again on the third day, He gathered together His apostles, whom fear, at the time of His being laid hold on, had put to flight; and while He sojourned with them forty days, He opened their hearts, interpreted to them the Scripture, which hitherto had been wrapped up in obscurity, ordained and fitted them for the preaching of His word and doctrine, and regulated all things concerning the institutions of the New Testament; and this having been accomplished, a cloud and whirlwind enveloped Him, and caught Him up from the sight of men unto heaven. His apostles were at that time eleven in number, to whom were added Matthias, in the room of the traitor Judas, and afterwards Paul. Then were they dispersed throughout all the earth to preach the Gospel, as the Lord their Master had commanded them; and during twenty-five years, and until the

beginning of the reign of the Emperor Nero, they occupied themselves in laying the foundations of the Church in every province and city. And while Nero reigned, the Apostle Peter came to Rome, and, through the power of God committed unto him, wrought certain miracles, and, by turning many to the true religion, built up a faithful and stedfast temple unto the Lord. When Nero heard of those things, and observed that not only in Rome, but in every other place, a great multitude revolted daily from the worship of idols, and, condemning their old ways, went over to the new religion, he, an execrable and pernicious tyrant, sprung forward to raze the heavenly temple and destroy the true faith. He it was who first persecuted the servants of God; he crucified Peter, and slew Paul: nor did he escape with impunity; for God looked on the affliction of His people; and therefore the tyrant, bereaved of authority, and precipitated from the height of empire, suddenly disappeared, and even the burial-place of that noxious wild beast was nowhere to be seen.

- 11) Pope St. Damasus (c. 392), *Decree of Damasus*, 3, mentions their deaths as the event that “consecrated” the Church of Rome and made it the first see in Christianity.

After the announcement of all these prophetic and evangelic as well as apostolic writings which we have listed above as Scriptures, on which, by the grace of God, the Catholic Church is founded, we have considered that it ought to be announced that although all the Catholic Churches spread abroad through the world comprise but one bridal chamber of Christ, nevertheless, the holy Roman Church has been placed at the forefront not by the conciliar decisions of other Churches, but has received the primacy by the evangelic voice of our Lord and Savior, who says: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it; and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall have bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall have loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” In addition to this, there is also the companionship of the vessel of election, the most blessed Apostle Paul, who contended and was crowned with a glorious death along with Peter in the City of Rome in the time of the Caesar Nero — not at a different time, as the heretics prattle, but at one and the same time and on one and the same day: and they equally consecrated the above-mentioned holy Roman Church to Christ the Lord; and by their own presence and by their venerable triumph they set it at the forefront over the others of all the cities of the whole world. The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the Apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish nor anything like it. The second see, however, is that at Alexandria, consecrated on behalf of blessed Peter by Mark, his disciple and an evangelist, who was sent to Egypt by the Apostle Peter, where he preached the world of truth and finished his glorious martyrdom. The third honorable see, indeed, is that at Antioch, which belonged to the most blessed Apostle Peter, where first he dwelt before he came to Rome and where the name *Christians* was first applied, as to a new people.

B. Their importance in the Church (Rock and Doctor of the Gentiles)

- 1) Very briefly — and with extraordinary understatement — Saints Peter and Paul had a crucial and enormous importance in the early Church that Christ founded. When they came to Rome, there was enormous significance tied to this. The fact that both — arguably the two greatest apostles — died here in Rome would not have been lost on the early Christians, most of whose Churches were traceable to one’s or the other’s work.

2) St. Peter

- a) He was Kepha, the Rock on whom Jesus promised to build His Church — against which Hell would not prevail — and to give the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matt. 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 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.” 20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

- b) NB: The Aramaic word Jesus would have used for Peter, kepha, is the same word in Aramaic for Rock. (We’ve necessarily lost this identity in the Greek translation of Matthew, which Catholic and Protestant Biblical scholars alike admit would have originally been written in Aramaic. In Greek, *Petros* is the name, which is masculine; *petra* is rock. It was probably not considered appropriate by the translators to give Peter a feminine name). St. John points to this translation.

John 1:42 He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

c) Peter was, like Paul after him, a chosen instrument to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers.

d) Since Jesus had deemed that there should be have the mission of being a Rock of unity among the twelve, later generations would reflect: Would it make any sense if this mission died with Peter, when future generations, further distant in time from Christ and the apostles, arguably would need an agent and symbol of unity even more than the early Church?

3) St. Paul

a) Saul of Tarsus was to the Christians in the 30s what Nero became in the 60s, and Christ converted him for persecuting the Church, with whom he personally identified (Acts 9:4).

b) He became God’s chosen instrument to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he did it throughout Asia Minor, Greece, Rome and even Spain.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; 16 I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

4) In sum, these were not just two “ordinary saints” or “ordinary apostles” but the Rock of Unity and Stability and the Greatest Evangelist of all time. That they put their Gospel into the Roman soil by their blood would have been highly significant to the early Church.

C. Their existence and work in Rome

1) St. Paul — no one doubts his presence. His itinerary and even his apostolic efforts are described at the end of the Acts of the Apostles.

Acts 28:11 Three months later we set sail on a ship that had wintered at the island, an Alexandrian ship with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. 12 We put in at Syracuse and stayed there for three days; 13 then we weighed anchor and came to Rhegium. After one day there a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. 14 There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. 15 The believers from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. 16 When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him. 17 Three days later he called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, yet I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. 18 When they had examined me, the Romans wanted to release me, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. 19 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to the emperor — even though I had no charge to bring against my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” 21 They replied, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken anything evil about you. 22 But we would like to hear from you what you think, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” 23 After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. 24 Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. 25 So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, 26 ‘Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. 27 For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn — and I would heal them.’ 28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” 29 30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense

and welcomed all who came to him, — 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

2) St. Peter

- a) The only Scriptural source we have is from his first letter, in which he uses the Jewish Code word Babylon to describe Rome. Babylon had been a Jewish code word for Rome since Pompeii took Jewish slaves to Rome in 51 BC (cf. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*).

1Pet. 5:13 Your sister church in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.

- b) No other Church ever claimed Peter died in their see — and if there were any doubt about where he died in the early Church, some almost certainly would have tried to claim him, because this would have been an extraordinary privilege and give that see great prestige.
- c) The presence of Peter is confirmed by the tomb found underneath the main altar of St. Peter's matching the description of a victory monument given by Gaius about the year 200. The bones that were found — a 5'6" man, who died between the ages of 60-75, with no tarsals or metatarsals, the bones of whom spent at least 100 years in the dirt underneath the victory monument, then were moved, covered with very rich gold and purple cloth, located inside a hidden repository in a buttressing wall that had no perduring purpose next to an inscription in Greek saying "Peter is here" — are extraordinarily consistent with the conclusion that they are Peter's.

3) Corroborating sources

- a) St. Irenaeus (c. 198) *Against Heresies*, describes their founding of the Church in Rome (3:1:1):

WE have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed "perfect knowledge," as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

- b) Eusebius of Caesaria, in his *The Chronicle* (c. 303), describes one of the earliest formulations of the length and tenure of St. Peter in Rome:

Second year of the two hundred and fifth olympiad (i.e., 42 AD) : the Apostle Peter, after he has established the Church in Antioch, is sent to Rome, where he remains as bishop of that city, preaching the gospel for twenty-five years. ... During the fourth year of the two hundred and eleventh olympiad (67 AD): Nero is the first, in addition to all of his other crimes, to make a persecution against the Christians, in which Peter and Paul died gloriously in Rome.

- 4) One question that is often asked about their "founding" the Church of Rome: If there were Christians here in Rome prior to the advent of Peter and Paul — as there certainly were, according to Paul's letter to the Romans — how can they be said to have founded the Church of Rome? Tertullian answered this question, writing that they "founded" the church of Rome by making it the depository of their apostolic teaching and by confirming their teaching with their martyrdom. In his words (which we saw above), c. 200, he wrote that the apostles "poured their whole teaching along with their blood" into the Church of Rome (*Pre* 36:3).

D. The meaning of the transition of the “center” of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome

- 1) Nowhere in Christian revelation did Jesus command the Apostles to move the “center” of the Church from Jerusalem to Rome.
- 2) On the other hand, nowhere did Jesus ever imply that it would stay in Jerusalem. In fact, he predicted that Jerusalem itself would be destroyed:

Luke 19:41 As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴ They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

- 3) Jesus’ task for the apostles is clearly missionary, to take the Gospel out to the world, rather than to remain, per se, in the city of Zion. The crucial expression is “Go” and “go out to all the world”:

Matt. 28:18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Mark 16:15 And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.

- 4) If this was the task at hand, it would be fitting, if there were to be a fixed location established, for it to be in the place where such missionary activity could best be coordinated, i.e., Rome.
- 5) Paul had been filled by God’s grace with an eagerness to come to Rome, as he said in his letter to the Romans:

Rom. 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³ the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴ and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵ through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶ including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, ⁷ To all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁸ First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. ⁹ For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, ¹⁰ asking that by God’s will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. ¹¹ For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — ¹² or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. ¹³ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles.

- 6) It was obvious as well that many Christians were going to Rome to preach the Gospel. Otherwise it would make no sense that Paul, who had never been to Rome, would have known so many people and asked them to be greeted by name in what is now Romans 16.
- 7) The fact that Peter and Paul both died in the city of Rome (when they could have been killed on countless other occasions in innumerable other cities) seems to show the hand of God in choosing Rome.
- 8) Ultimately we know only the fact that they both lived and — in a certain sense more importantly — died here. Only God ultimately knows the underlying reasons.

- 9) From the Catholic perspective — beyond any argument of fittingness — the significance of Rome came from the fact that Peter himself came lived here, died here and had his successor here.
 - a) Christ had made Peter the center of the unity of the Church (Mt 16:18-19).
 - b) Rome was and remains important because of the living succession of Peter's ministry as bishop of Rome (even while the Popes were in captivity in Avignon, for example).
 - c) The popes are both successors to Peter and heirs to what was passed on to him by Christ, which they are to protect.
 - d) They also, in a real sense, are heirs to Paul and his mission to teach all of the nations.

IV. Reflection on the meaning of Rome's role in the Early Church

The significance of Rome in the early Church was large and it grew gradually over the time period we're covering. For the sake of clarity, we will look at the influence under four general headings which seem to be most appropriate for the discussion at hand:

A. Solitude for the churches

- 1) St. Clement, 4th Pope (c. 92-101). He wrote a letter to the Church of Corinth which was in dissension and trying to get rid of their priests (1:1; 57:1; 59:1; 63:2). The priests appealed to the Church of Rome — *which is very telling, considering it was still during the lifetime of St. John the Evangelist*. This letter was read among the early Churches in their Sunday liturgies until the time of the formation of the canon of Scripture (it was excluded on the basis of not coming from apostolic origin, although its teaching continued to be affirmed).

THE Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth, to them that are called and sanctified by the will of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, from Almighty God through Jesus Christ, be multiplied. Owing, dear brethren, to the sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points respecting which you consulted us; and especially to that shameful and detestable sedition, utterly abhorrent to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-confident persons have kindled to such a pitch of frenzy, that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be universally loved, has suffered grievous injury.

You, therefore, who laid the foundation of the rebellion, submit to the presbyters and be chastened to repentance, bending your knees in a spirit of humility.

If anyone disobey the things which have been said by Him through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger. We, however, shall be innocent of this sin, and will pray with earnest entreaty and supplication that the Creator of all may keep unharmed the number of His elect, which has been counted up in the whole world, through His beloved Child Jesus Christ, through whom He has called us from darkness to light and from ignorance to the full knowledge of the glory of his name.

You will afford us joy and gladness if, being obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy, in accord with the plea for peace and concord which we have made in this letter.

- 2) Some churches are slow to accept this solitude for all the Churches coming from the See of Rome, as we see with the Bishops of Asia minor concerning the Quartodeciman controversy in the 2nd century (about the date for Easter) and with the problem with lapsed Christians after the persecution of Decius (251), in which the Pope Stephen inveighed against African bishops calling them to be merciful to them and against the need for rebaptism. Yet St. Irenaeus recognized that Victor, bishop of Rome, had the power to excommunicate, but urged him not to following the practice of Pope St. Anicetus (preserved by Eusebius, Church History, 4:24:11-18):

And when the blessed Polycarp was at Rome in the time of Anicetus and they disagreed a little about certain other things, they immediately made peace with one another, not caring to quarrel over this matter. For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it as he said that he ought to follow the customs of the presbyters that had preceded him. But though matters were in this shape, they communicated together, and Anicetus conceded the administration of the eucharist in the church to Polycarp, manifestly as a mark of respect. And they parted from each other in peace, both those who observed, and those who did not, maintaining the peace of the whole church.

B. Presiding in charity and unity

- 1) St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107 AD), writes to Rome that this Church “presides in love” and also has “taught others” which he hopes remains in force (1:1; 3:1):

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which has obtained mercy, through the majesty of the Most High God the Father, and of Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son; the Church which is sanctified and enlightened by the will of God, who formed all things that are according to the faith and love of Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour; the Church which presides in the place of the region of the Romans, and which is worthy of God, worthy of honour, worthy of the highest happiness, worthy of praise, worthy of credit, worthy of being deemed holy, and which presides in love, is named from Christ, and from the Father, and is possessed of the Spirit, which I also salute in the name of Almighty God, and of Jesus Christ His Son: to those who are united, both according to the flesh and spirit, to every one of His commandments, who are filled inseparably with all the grace of God, and are purified from every strange taint, [I wish] abundance of happiness unblameably, in God, even the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . (3:1) Ye have never envied any one; ye have taught others. Now I desire that those things may be confirmed [by your conduct], which in your instructions ye enjoin [on others]. Only request in my behalf both inward and outward strength, that I may not only speak, but [truly] will, so that I may not merely be called a Christian, but really found to be one.

- 2) He also writes in his *Letter to the Romans* about the special authority of Saints Peter and Paul, who must have been rulers there since they commanded in a way different than a bishop (13:1):

I write to all the Churches, and impress on them all, that I shall willingly die for God, unless ye hinder me. I beseech of you not to show an unseasonable goodwill towards me. Suffer me to become food for the wild beasts, through whose instrumentality it will be granted me to attain to God. I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God. Rather entice the wild beasts, that they may become my tomb, and may leave nothing of my body; so that when I have fallen asleep [in death], I may not be found troublesome to any one. Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Entreat the Lord for me, that by these instruments I may be found a sacrifice to God. I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you. They were apostles of Jesus Christ, but I am the very least [of believers]: they were free, as the servants of God; while I am, even until now, a servant. But when I suffer, I shall be the freedman of Jesus Christ, and shall rise again emancipated in Him. And now, being in bonds for Him, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain.

- 3) The Shepherd of Hermas (c. 140-155), written by the brother of Pope Pius I, probably in Rome, is an apocalyptic work focusing on various visions (Vis 2:4:3). It shows the understanding of the “duty” of the Bishop of Rome in the middle of the second century (looking back at the papacy of Clement).

Therefore shall you write two little books and send one to Clement and one to Grapte. Clement shall then send it to the cities abroad, because that is his duty; and Grapte shall instruct the widows and the orphans. But you shall read it in this city along with the presbyters who are in charge of the Church.

- 4) Dionysius of Corinth, in a letter to Pope St. Soter of Rome (166-174), describes the solicitous charity of that particular Church for all Christians (this is preserved for us by Eusebius in his *Church History*, 4:23:9):

There is extant also another epistle written by Dionysius to the Romans, and addressed to Soter, [15] who was bishop at that time. We cannot do better than to subjoin some passages from this epistle, in which he commends the practice of the Romans which has been retained down to the persecution in our own days. His words are as follows: "For from the beginning it has been your practice to do good to all the brethren in various ways, and to send contributions to many churches in every city. Thus relieving the want of the needy, and making provision for the brethren in the mines by the gifts which you have sent from the beginning, you Romans keep up the hereditary customs of the Romans, which your blessed bishop Soter has not only maintained, but also added to, furnishing an abundance of supplies to the saints,, and encouraging

the brethren from abroad with blessed words, as a loving father his children." In this same epistle he makes mention also of Clement's epistle to the Corinthians, showing that it had been the custom from the beginning to read it in the church. His words are as follows: "To-day we have passed the Lord's holy day, in which we have read your epistle. From it, whenever we read it, we shall always be able to draw advice, as also from the former epistle, which was written 'to us through Clement.

- 5) St. Cyprian of Carthage, in his *Letter to Pope St. Cornelius* (252 AD), describes that the unity of the priesthood (the sacraments and apostolic succession) comes from Rome (59:14). This is attested on top of the baldachino inside St. Peter's, *hinc sacerdotii unitas exoritur (hinc una fides refulget):*

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to the chair of Peter and to the principal Church, in which sacerdotal unity has its source; nor did they take thought that these are Romans, whose faith was praised by the preaching Apostle, and among whom it is not possible for perfidy to have entrance.

- 6) St. Cyprian, in his *Letter to All His People* in 251, wrote about the One Chair founded on Peter by the word of the Lord (43:5):

They who have not peace themselves now offer peace to others. They who have withdrawn from the Church promise to lead back and to recall the lapsed to the Church. There is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and one Chair founded on Peter by the word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood besides that one altar and that one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering.

- 7) St. Ambrose and other Synod Fathers wrote a *Letter to Pope Siricius*, c. 389 AD, in which they profess the belief in the jurisdiction of the See of Peter (42:1):

We recognized in the letter of your holiness the vigilance of the good shepherd. You faithfully watch over the gate entrusted to you, and with pious solicitude you guard Christ's sheepfold, you that are worthy to have the Lord's sheep hear and follow you. Since you know the sheep of Christ you will easily catch the wolves and confront them like a wary shepherd, lest they disperse the Lord's flock by their constant lack of faith and their bestial howling.

C. Rule of faith in Apostolic Succession against Heresies

- 1) St. Hegesippus visited Rome during the papacy of St. Anicetus (c. 155-156). He probably wrote his *Memoires* c. 180, a part of which is preserved in Eusebius' *Church History*, 4:22:1. He describes that the faith was preached and preserved by "every succession."

Hegesippus and the Events which he mentions. Hegesippus in the five books of Memoirs which have come down to us has left a most complete record of his own views. In them he states that on a journey to Rome he met a great many bishops, and that he received the same doctrine from all. It is fitting to hear what he says after making some remarks about the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians. His words are as follows: "And the church of Corinth continued in the true faith until Primus was bishop in Corinth. I conversed with them on my way to Rome, and abode with the Corinthians many days, during which we were mutually refreshed in the true doctrine. And when I had come to Rome I remained there until Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus. And Anicetus was succeeded by Soter, and he by Eleutherus. In every succession, and in every city that is held which is preached by the law and the prophets and the Lord."

- 2) St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 198), in *Against Heresies*, writes about the necessity of Apostolic Succession to argue against heresies. It is so illustrative it deserves to be printed at length (3:3:1-4):

1. A REFUTATION OF THE HERETICS, FROM THE FACT THAT, IN THE VARIOUS CHURCHES, A PERPETUAL SUCCESSION OF BISHOPS WAS KEPT UP. It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to "the perfect" apart and

privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men; which men, if they discharged their functions honestly, would be a great boon [to the Church], but if they should fall away, the direst calamity.

2. Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre- eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.

3. The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome despatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles, proclaiming the one God, omnipotent, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Creator of man, who brought on the deluge, and called Abraham, who led the people from the land of Egypt, spake with Moses, set forth the law, sent the prophets, and who has prepared fire for the devil and his angels. From this document, whosoever chooses to do so, may learn that He, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was preached by the Churches, and may also understand the apostolical tradition of the Church, since this Epistle is of older date than these men who are now propagating falsehood, and who conjure into existence another god beyond the Creator and the Maker of all existing things. To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Sorer having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.

- 3) Tertullian, in his *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 32:1, likewise discusses the importance of apostolic succession and communion with those churches in apostolic succession:

But if there be any (heresies) which are bold enough to plant themselves in the midst Of the apostolic age, that they may thereby seem to have been handed down by the apostles, because they existed in the time of the apostles, we can say: Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [that first bishop of theirs] bishop shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men,--a man, moreover, who continued stedfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers: as the church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter. In exactly the same way the other churches likewise exhibit (their several worthies), whom, as having been appointed to their episcopal places by apostles, they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed. Let the heretics contrive something of the same kind. For after their blasphemy, what is there that is unlawful for them (to attempt)? But should they even effect the contrivance, they will not advance a step. For their very doctrine, after comparison with that of the apostles, will declare, by its own diversity and contrariety, that it had for its author neither an apostle nor an apostolic man; because, as the apostles would never have taught things which were self-contradictory, so the apostolic men would not have inculcated teaching different from the apostles, unless they who received their instruction from the apostles went and preached in a contrary manner. To this test, therefore will they be submitted for proof by those churches, who, although they derive not their founder from apostles or apostolic men (as being of much later date, for they are in fact being founded daily), yet, since they agree in the same faith, they are accounted as not less apostolic because they are akin in doctrine. Then let all the heresies, when challenged to these two tests by our apostolic church, offer their proof of how they deem themselves to be apostolic. But in truth they neither are so, nor are they able to prove themselves to be what they are not. Nor are they admitted to peaceful relations and communion by such churches as are in any way connected with apostles, inasmuch as they are in no sense themselves apostolic because of their diversity as to the mysteries of the faith.

- 4) St. Jerome, in his *Letter to Pope Damasus* (374-379) states that he will only be in communion with those who are in union with Rome and identifies the Rock with the living see of Peter (15:2):

I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but Your Blessedness, that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside this house is profane. Anyone who is not in the ark of Noah (the Church) will perish when the flood prevails.

- 5) St. Augustine, in his *Letter to Generosus* (c. 400), 53:1:2, lists the successors of the see of Peter to show that there was not one Donatist among them:

For if the lineal succession of bishops is to be taken into account, with how much more certainty and benefit to the Church do we reckon back till we reach Peter himself, to whom, as bearing in a figure the whole Church, the Lord said: "Upon this rock will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it!" The successor of Peter was Linus, and his successors in unbroken continuity were these: -- Clement, Anacletus, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telesphorus, Iginus, Anicetus, Pius, Soter, Eleutherius, Victor, Zephyrinus, Calixtus, Urbanus, Pontianus, Antherus, Fabianus, Cornelius, Lucius, Stephanus, Xystus, Dionysius, Felix, Eutychianus, Gaius, Marcellinus, Marcellus, Eusebius, Miltiades, Sylvester, Marcus, Julius, Liberius, Damasus, and Siricius, whose successor is the present Bishop Anastasius. In this order of succession no Donatist bishop is found.

D. Location of the Successor of St. Peter. Peter still speaks.

- 1) St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, 3:3:3, cited above.
- 2) Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 32:1, cited above.
- 3) St. Cyprian of Alexandria, in his *Letter to Antonianus*, Bishop in Numidia (c. 251-252), writes about his contemporary, Pope Cornelius, sitting in the see of Peter:

I come now, dearest brother, to the character of Cornelius our colleague, that with us you may more justly know Cornelius, not from the lies of malignants and detractors, but from the judgment of the Lord God, who made him a bishop, and from the testimony of his fellow-bishops, the whole number of whom has agreed with an absolute unanimity throughout the whole world. For,--a thing which with laudable announcement commends our dearest Cornelius to God and Christ, and to His Church, and also to all his fellow-priests,--he was not one who on a sudden attained to the episcopate; but, promoted through all the ecclesiastical offices, and having often deserved well of the Lord in divine administrations, he ascended by all the grades of religious service to the lofty summit of the Priesthood. Then, moreover, he did not either ask for the episcopate itself, nor did he wish it; nor, as others do when the swelling of their arrogance and pride inflates them, did he seize upon it; but quiet otherwise, and meek and such as those are accustomed to be who are chosen of God to this office, having regard to the modesty of his virgin continency, and the humility of his inborn and guarded veneration, he did not, as some do, use force to be made a bishop, but he himself suffered compulsion, so as to be forced to receive the episcopal office. And he was made bishop by very many of our colleagues who were then present in the city of Rome, who sent to us letters concerning his ordination, honourable and laudatory, and remarkable for their testimony in announcement of him. Moreover, Cornelius was made bishop by the judgment of God and of His Christ, by the testimony of almost all the clergy, by the suffrage of the people who were then present, and by the assembly of ancient priests and good men, when no one had been made so before him, when the place of Fabian, that is, when the place of Peter and the degree of the sacerdotal throne was vacant; which being occupied by the will of God, and established by the consent of all of us, whosoever now wishes to become a bishop, must needs be made from without; and he cannot have the ordination of the Church who does not hold the unity of the Church. Whoever he may be, although greatly boasting about himself, and claiming very much for himself, he is profane, he is an alien, he is without. And as after the first there cannot be a second, whosoever is made after one who ought to be alone, is not second to him, but is in fact none at all.

- 4) The Council of Sardica (c. 342-343), canon 3, describes the appellate role of the See of Peter:

But if any bishop loses the judgment in some case, and still believes that he has not a bad but a good case, in order that the case may be judged anew, if it pleases Your Charities, let us honor the memory of the Apostle Peter, by having those who gave the judgment write to Julius, Bishop of Rome, so that, if it seem proper, he may himself send arbiters and judgment may be made again by the bishops of a neighboring province.

- 5) Parmenium (c. 367), in his *De schismate Donatistarum*, 2:2 describes the apostolic foundation of Rome and instructs all claimants to founding Churches to “recall the origins” of their foundation:

You cannot deny that you are aware that in the city of Rome the episcopal chair was given first to Peter; the chair in which Peter sat, the same who was head — that is why he is also called Cephas — of all the Apostles; the one chair in which unity is maintained by all. Neither do other Apostles proceed individually on their own; and anyone who would set up another chair in opposition to that single chair would, by that very fact, be a schismatic and a sinner. It was Peter, then, who first occupied that chair, the foremost of his endowed gifts. He was succeeded by Linus, Linus was succeeded by Clement, Clement by Anencletus, Anencletus by Evaristus, Evaristus by Eleutherus, Eleutherus by Xystus, Xystus by Telesphorus, Telesphorus by Hyginus, Hyginus by Anicetus, Anicetus by Pius, Pius by Soter, Soter by Alexander, Alexander by Victor, Victory by Sephyrinus, Zephyrinus by Callistus, Callistus by Urban, Urban by Pontianus, Pontianus by Anterus, Anterus by Fabian, Fabian by Cornelius, Cornelius by Lucius, Lucius by Stephen, Stephen by Xystus, Xystus by Dionysius, Dionysius by Felix, Felix by Marcellinus, Marcellinus by Eusebius, Eusebius by Melchiades, Melchiades by Sylvester, Sylvester by Mark, Mark by Julius, Julius by Liberius, Liberius by Damasus, Damasus by Siricus, our present incumbent... I but ask you to recall the origins of your chair, you who wish to claim for yourselves the title of holy Church.

- 6) Pope Siricius (384-399) wrote about Peter’s continual presence in his successors:

We carry the burden of all who are burdened; in fact, the blessed apostle Peter carries these burdens in us, he who, as we trust, protects and defends us in everything as the heirs to his office (cf. DS 181).

- 7) St. Augustine, *Letter to Generosus* (c. 400), 53:1:2, quoted above.

- 8) Pope St. Innocent I, in his *Letter to the Fathers of the Council of Carthage*, Jan 27, 417, describes the Petrine origin of the Apostolic See:

In seeking the things of God... following the examples of ancient tradition... you have strengthened ... the vigor of your religion with true reason, for you have acknowledged that judgment is to be referred to us, and have shown that you know what is owed to the Apostolic See, if all of us placed in this position are to desire to follow the Apostle himself from whom the episcopate itself and the total authority of this name have emerged. Following him, we know how to condemn evils just as well as we know how to approve what is laudable. Or rather, guarding with your priestly office what the Fathers instituted, you did not regard what they had decided, not by human but by divine judgments, as something to be trampled on. They did not regard anything as finished, even though it was the concern of distant and remote provinces, until it had come to the notice of this See, so that what was a just pronouncement might be confirmed by the total authority of this See, and thence other Churches — just as all waters proceed from their own natal source and, through the various regions of the whole world, remain pure liquids of an incorrupted head — might take up what they ought to teach, whom they ought to wash, whom the water worthy of clean bodies who should as being soiled with a filth incapable of being cleansed.

- 9) St. Augustine, in one of his Sermons (131:10) manifested his belief that Rome is the final authority:

[On this matter of the Pelagians] two Councils have already been sent to the Apostolic See; and from there rescripts too have come. The matter is at an end; would that the error too might sometime be at an end!

- 10) St. Augustine, in his *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, (420), wrote (2:3:5) that when the Pope rules, all doubt is taken away:

Caelestius’ booklet was called Catholic, because this too pertains to a Catholic mind: that if someone perhaps thinks otherwise than the truth demands, he does not define it with utmost certainty but, when it is detected and demonstrated, he rejects it. For it was not to heretics but to Catholics that the Apostle was speaking when he said: “Let us, therefore, as many of us as are perfect, be of this mind; and if in anything you be minded otherwise, that too God will reveal to you” (Phil 3:15). This was thought to have been done in the case of Caelestius, when he responded that he agreed with the letters of Pope Innocent of blessed memory, in which all doubt in this matter was taken away.

- 11) St. Peter Chrysologus, *Letter to Eutyches* (449), says that the successor of Rome is the living Peter who needs to be respected (25:2):

We exhort you in every respect, honorable brother, to heed obediently what has been written by the Most Blessed Pope of the City of Rome; for Blessed Peter, who lives and presides in his own see, provides the truth of faith to those who seek it. For we, by reason of our pursuit of peace and faith, cannot try cases on the faith without the consent of the Bishop of the City of Rome.

- 12) Pope St. Leo the Great, in his *Letter to Bishops of the Province of Vienne*, July 445 (10:1-2), stresses the unique position of the Apostolic See (See of Peter) in Christianity:

To the beloved brothers, the whole body of bishops of the province of Vienne, Leo, bishop of Rome. Our LORD Jesus Christ, Saviour of mankind, instituted the observance of the Divine religion which He wished by the grace of GOD to shed its brightness upon all nations and all peoples in such a way that the Truth, which before was confined to the announcements of the Law and the Prophets, might through the Apostles' trumpet blast go out for the salvation of all men, as it is written: "Their sound has gone out into every land, and their words into the ends of the world." But this mysterious function the LORD wished to be indeed the concern of all the apostles, but in such a way that He has placed the principal charge on the blessed Peter, chief of all the Apostles: and from him as from the Head wishes His gifts to flow to all the body: so that any one who dares to secede from Peter's solid rock may understand that he has no part or lot in the divine mystery. For He wished him who had been received into partnership in His undivided unity to be named what He Himself was, when He said: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church :" that the building of the eternal temple by the wondrous gift of GOD'S grace might rest on Peter's solid rock: strengthening His Church so surely that neither could human rashness assail it nor the gates of hell prevail against it. But this most holy firmness of the rock, reared, as we have said, by the building hand of GOD, a man must wish to destroy in over-weening wickedness when he tries to break down its power, by favouring his own desires, and not following what he received from men of old: for he believes himself subject to no law, and held in check by no rules of GOD's ordinances and breaks away, in his eagerness for novelty, from your use and ours, by adopting illegal practices, and letting what he ought to keep fall into abeyance. But with the approval, as we believe, of GOD, and retaining towards you the fulness of our love which the Apostolic See always, as you remember, expends upon you, holy brethren we are striving to correct these things by mature counsel, and to share with you the task of setting your churches in order, not by innovations but by restoration of the old; that we may persevere in the accustomed state which our fathers handed down to us, and please our GOD through the ministry of a good work by removing the scandals of disturbances. And so we would have you recollect, brethren, as we do, that the Apostolic See, such is the reverence in which it is held, has times out of number been referred to and consulted by the priests of your province as well as others, and in the various matters of appeal, as the old usage demanded, it has reversed or confirmed decisions: and in this way "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace " has been kept, and by the interchange of letters, our honourable proceedings have promoted a lasting affection: for "seeking not our own but the things of Christ," we have been careful not to do despite to the dignity which GoD has given both to the churches and their priests. But this path which with our fathers has been always so well kept to and wisely maintained, Hilary has quitted, and is likely to disturb the position and agreement of the priests by his novel arrogance: desiring to subject you to his power in such a way as not to suffer himself to be subject to the blessed Apostle Peter, claiming for himself the ordinations of all the churches throughout the provinces of Gaul, and transferring to himself the dignity which is due to metropolitan priests; he diminishes even the reverence that is paid to the blessed Peter himself with his proud words: for not only was the power of loosing and binding given to Peter before the others, but also to Peter more especially was entrusted the care of feeding the sheep. Yet any one who holds that the headship must be denied to Peter, cannot really diminish his dignity: but is puffed up with the breath of his pride, and plunges himself into the lowest depth.

- 13) Pope St. Leo the Great, in his *Letter to Anastasius*, Bishop of Thessalonica, 446 (1:1, 14:11), underlines the distinctions among the apostles that remain to his day:

If with true reasoning you perceived all that has been committed to you, brother, by the blessed apostle Peter's authority, and what has also been entrusted to you by our favour, and would weigh it fairly, we should be able greatly to rejoice at your zealous discharge of the responsibility imposed on you. ... But if in that which you believed necessary to be discussed and settled with the brethren, their opinion differs from your own wishes, let all be referred to us, with the minutes of your proceedings attested, that all ambiguities may be removed, and what is pleasing to God decided. For to this end we direct all our desires and pains, that what conduces to our harmonious unity and to the protection of discipline may be marred by no dissension and neglected by no slothfulness. Therefore, dearly beloved brother, you and those our brethren who are offended at your extravagant conduct (though the matter of complaint is not the same with all), we exhort and warn not to disturb by any wrangling what has been rightfully ordained and wisely settled. Let none "seek what is his own, but what is another's," as the Apostle says: "Let each one of you please his neighbour for his good unto edifying." For the cementing of our unity cannot be firm unless we be bound by the bond of love into an inseparable solidity: because "as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office; so we being many are one body in Christ, and all of us members one of another." The connexion of the whole body makes all alike healthy, all alike beautiful: and this connexion

requires the unanimity indeed of the whole body, but it especially demands harmony among the bishops. And though they have a common dignity, yet they have not uniform rank; inasmuch as even among the blessed Apostles, notwithstanding the similarity of their honourable estate, there was a certain distinction of power, and while the election of them all was equal, yet it was given to one to take the lead of the rest. From which model has arisen a distinction between bishops also, and by an important ordinance it has been provided that every one should not claim everything for himself: but that there should be in each province one whose opinion should have the priority among the brethren: and again that certain whose appointment is in the greater cities should undertake a fuller responsibility, through whom the care of the universal Church should converge towards Peter's one seat, and nothing anywhere should be separated from its Head.

14) In conclusion and summary, we can see essentially the same perspective of the Catholic Church today in a recent document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, written by its Prefect, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, entitled, *The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mission of the Church* (Nov 1998), numbers 3-4 on the "origin, purpose and nature of the primacy" of the living Peter:

3. "First Simon, who is called Peter". With this significant emphasis on the primacy of Simon Peter, St Matthew inserts in his Gospel the list of the Twelve Apostles, which also begins with the name of Simon in the other two synoptic Gospels and in Acts. This list, which has great evidential force, and other Gospel passages show clearly and simply that the New Testament canon received what Christ said about Peter and his role in the group of the Twelve. Thus, in the early Christian communities, as later throughout the Church, the image of Peter remained fixed as that of the Apostle who, despite his human weakness, was expressly assigned by Christ to the first place among the Twelve and was called to exercise a distinctive, specific task in the Church. He is the rock on which Christ will build his Church; he is the one, after he has been converted, whose faith will not fail and who will strengthen his brethren; lastly, he is the Shepherd who will lead the whole community of the Lord's disciples. In Peter's person, mission and ministry, in his presence and death in Rome attested by the most ancient literary and archaeological tradition - the Church sees a deeper reality essentially related to her own mystery of communion and salvation: "Ubi Petrus, ibi ergo Ecclesia". From the beginning and with increasing clarity, the Church has understood that, just as there is a succession of the Apostles in the ministry of Bishops, so too the ministry of unity entrusted to Peter belongs to the permanent structure of Christ's Church and that this succession is established in the see of his martyrdom.

4. On the basis of the New Testament witness, the Catholic Church teaches, as a doctrine of faith, that the Bishop of Rome is the Successor of Peter in his primatial service in the universal Church; this succession explains the preeminence of the Church of Rome, enriched also by the preaching and martyrdom of St Paul. In the divine plan for the primacy as "the office that was given individually by the Lord to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be handed on to his successors", we already see the purpose of the Petrine charism, i.e., "the unity of faith and communion" of all believers. The Roman Pontiff, as the Successor of Peter, is "the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity both of the Bishops and of the multitude of the faithful" and therefore he has a specific ministerial grace for serving that unity of faith and communion which is necessary for the Church to fulfil her saving mission.

