

POPE BENEDICT XVI



*“You are Peter, and on this rock
I will build my church.”*

MATTHEW 16:18

The Papacy

- It is the oldest continuing institution in the world.
- Two hundred sixty-five men have held the office in an unbroken line of succession.
- In the present day, over one billion souls are under its care.
- And it all started with a call to a man named Simon, casting his net into the Sea of Galilee.



“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

— Mt. 4:19

Who Is the Pope?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to share the Good News of God’s love and save humanity from sin and death through his death and resurrection.

Jesus sent his apostles to continue his mission: to witness to the truth of what he taught and to bring all people into relationship with him through baptism (Mt. 28:16-20). St. Peter was charged by Jesus himself to be the head of the apostles (Mt. 16:18) — i.e., the first pope.

As bishop of Rome, St. Peter was martyred around AD 67, so from early on, the bishop of Rome was understood to be the successor of St. Peter in particular and a special sign of unity and leadership among all the other bishops.

In Rome today, you can visit the ancient Roman cemetery that has been excavated under St. Peter’s Basilica. At the end of the tour, you see the place honored by early Roman Christians as Peter’s tomb, over which the Emperor Constantine built the first basilica



in the fourth century. From that spot you can look up and know that you are directly under the altar where Pope Benedict, as St. Peter’s successor, celebrates Mass today, preaching the very same Gospel passed on by St. Peter to a world that still hungers for the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ.

Who Was Peter?

Peter's name was originally Simon. He and his brother Andrew were fishermen, the first disciples of Jesus called to be his apostles. The Gospels tell us they followed Jesus without hesitation (Mt. 4:20; Lk. 5:1-11), and that Jesus changed Simon's name to "Peter," which means "rock."

The Gospels reveal that Peter was a passionate man. He denied knowing Jesus on the eve of the Crucifixion, repented, and was forgiven. Later, he served as the first bishop of the Church in Antioch and, ultimately, in Rome, where he was martyred.



The Catechism of the Catholic Church

936 The Lord made St. Peter the visible foundation of his Church. He entrusted the keys of the Church to him. The bishop of the Church of Rome, successor to St. Peter, is “head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ and Pastor of the universal Church on earth” (CIC, can. 331).

The Pope’s Responsibilities

Many people misunderstand the responsibilities of a pope, thinking that he is a figure who unilaterally dictates what Catholics must do and believe. This is not so. Our faith is a gift from Christ through the apostles. The pope functions as the head of the bishops, to work in unity with them to teach, lead, and sanctify — to safeguard what has been handed down, not invent new ideas.

At the Mass inaugurating his papacy in April of 2005, Pope Benedict spoke directly about the pope’s responsibilities, passed down to each pope from St. Peter, using the two symbols given to him at that Mass as a starting point:

The Pallium

“The first symbol is the Pallium, woven in pure wool, which will be placed on my shoulders. This ancient sign . . . may be considered an image of the yoke of Christ, which the Bishop of this City, the Servant of the Servants of God, takes upon his shoulders. God’s yoke is God’s will, which we accept. . . . The symbolism of the Pallium is even more concrete: the lamb’s wool is meant to represent the lost, sick, or weak sheep, which the shepherd places on his shoulders and carries to the waters of life.”

The Fisherman’s Ring

“The second symbol used in today’s liturgy to express the inauguration of the Petrine Ministry is the presentation of the fisherman’s ring. Peter’s call to be a shepherd, which we heard in the Gospel, comes after the account of a miraculous catch of fish. . . . Today too the Church and the successors of the Apostles are told to put out into the deep sea of history and to let down the nets, so as to win men and women over to the Gospel — to God, to Christ, to true life.”



Stefano Spaziani

Who Is Pope Benedict?

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was elected by the College of Cardinals to the papacy on April 19, 2005. He took the name Benedict after two great figures: St. Benedict of Nursia, whose model of monastic life helped rebuild European culture after the collapse of the Roman Empire; and Pope Benedict XV, who was committed to bringing peace to a Europe torn by war — World War I.

Pope Benedict was born on April 16, 1927, on Holy Saturday. In his youth, he was exposed to the horrors of Nazi Germany, which left a lasting impression on him. After the war, in 1951, his brother Georg and he were ordained on the same day.

His lifelong passion for learning and teaching led him to serve as a professor of theology at German universities for twenty-six years. He authored many books on theology, Scripture, liturgy, and the life of the Christian in the modern world. A renowned scholar, he attended the sessions of the Second Vatican Council as an influential theological advisor.

After a short stint as Archbishop of Munich, he was called to Rome by Pope John Paul II in 1981. He served as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the office responsible for safeguarding the faithful teaching of the Gospel throughout the Church, until his election as pope.

As pope, Benedict XVI has dedicated himself to the responsibilities of his office: appointing and meeting with bishops, meeting with world leaders, canonizing saints, preaching, and teaching. He has published two encyclicals, one on love (*Deus Caritas Est*) and one on hope (*Spe Salvi*), as well as the best-selling book *Jesus of Nazareth*.

Jesus Christ is the Answer to the World's Questions and Fears

A pope's primary responsibility is preserving the truth of the Gospel Jesus taught in the modern world. But popes are individuals, with their own particular gifts and emphases in thinking. As Pope Benedict XVI shares the Gospel, his homilies, speeches, encyclicals, and books reflect certain themes that he clearly believes are important for the world to take to heart:

- **Faith is a life-giving friendship with Christ:**

If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.

— Inaugural Mass homily, April 24, 2005

- **A Christian loves and serves as Jesus did:**

In God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend.

— *Deus Caritas Est*, 5

- **Faith and Reason are not opposed:**

Faith presupposes reason and perfects it, and reason, enlightened by faith, finds the strength to rise to knowledge of God and spiritual realities.

— *Angelus*, January 28, 2007

- **Living a life of faith is hard — but worth the effort:**

We all know that to reach a goal in a sport or in one's profession, discipline and sacrifices are required; but then, by reaching a desired goal, it is all crowned with success. Life itself is like this. In other words, becoming men and women according to Jesus' plan demands sacrifices, but these are by no means negative; on the contrary, they are a help in living as people with new hearts, in living a truly human and happy life.

— From the book *Questions and Answers*

Did you know?

- Some 2.8 million people took part in events with Pope Benedict XVI in Rome in 2007. Those numbers are the highest ever for any pope.
- Pope Benedict's encyclicals have both sold over a million copies within weeks of their release.
- Pope Benedict's book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, published in the spring of 2007, has sold millions of copies and been translated into thirty-two languages.

In the homily at his Inaugural Mass, Pope Benedict asked for our prayers:

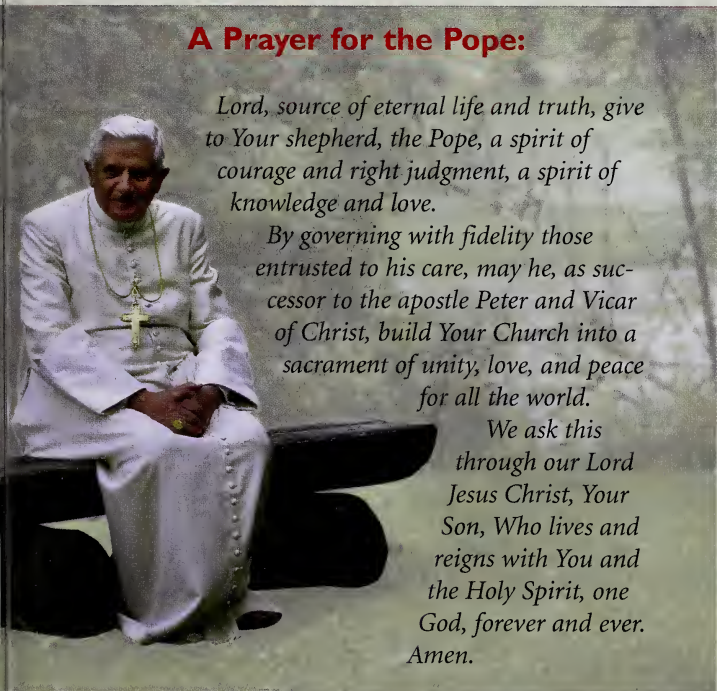
My dear friends — at this moment I can only say: pray for me, that I may learn to love the Lord more and more. Pray for me, that I may learn to love his flock more and more — in other words, you, the holy Church, each one of you and all of you together. Pray for me, that I may not flee for fear of the wolves. Let us pray for one another, that the Lord will carry us and that we will learn to carry one another.

A Prayer for the Pope:

Lord, source of eternal life and truth, give to Your shepherd, the Pope, a spirit of courage and right judgment, a spirit of knowledge and love.

By governing with fidelity those entrusted to his care, may he, as successor to the apostle Peter and Vicar of Christ, build Your Church into a sacrament of unity, love, and peace for all the world.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



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For further reading:

The writings and homilies of Pope Benedict XVI are all available at the Vatican website:
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/index.htm

The Apostles, Pope Benedict XVI, Our Sunday Visitor, 2007

The Apostles Study Guide, Amy Welborn, Our Sunday Visitor, 2007

Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict XVI, Doubleday, 2007

Questions and Answers, Pope Benedict XVI, Our Sunday Visitor, 2008

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Our Sunday Visitor

200 Noll Plaza • Huntington, IN 46750
1-800-348-2440 • Fax: 1-800-498-6709 • www.osv.com

ISBN: 978-1-59276-490-7 • Inventory Number: P729

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By Amy Welborn

Imprimatur: ✠ Donald William Wuerl, Archdiocese of Washington
January 16, 2008

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US \$14.95

ISBN 978-1-59276-490-7

