

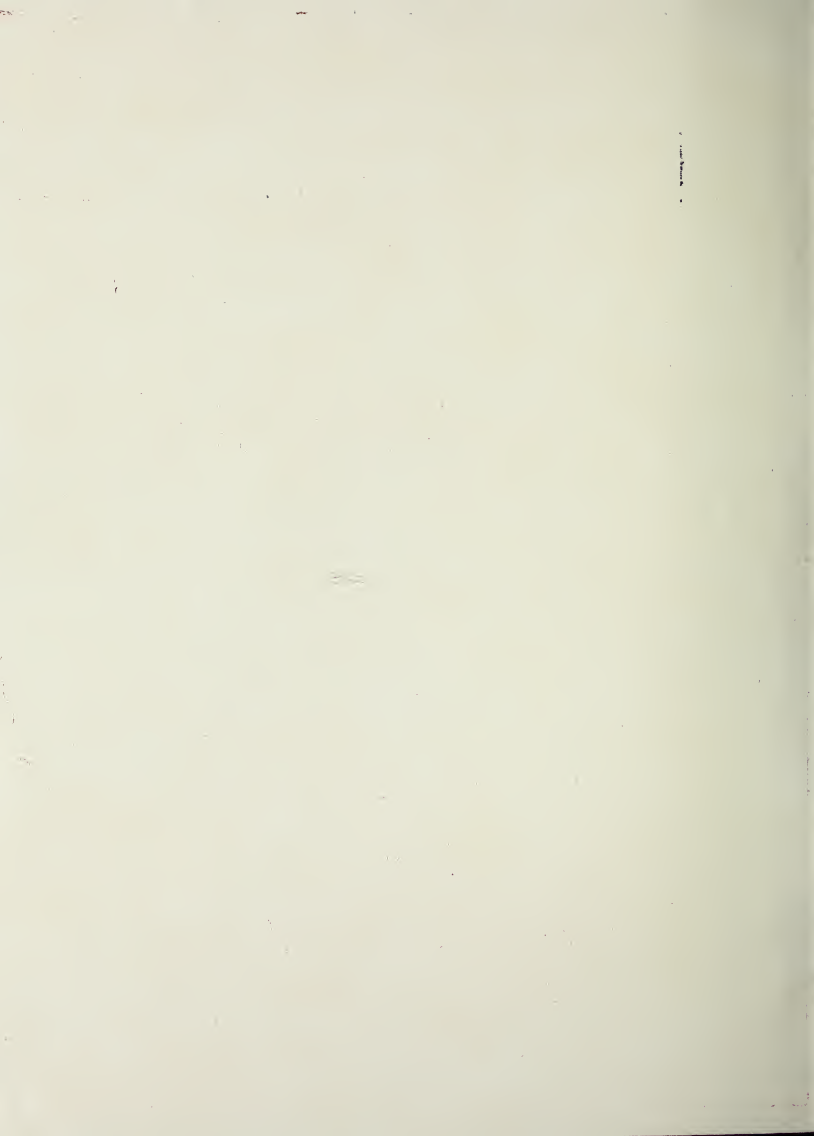
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Peter: prince
AD# 9724

Peter

PRINCE OF THE

Apostles

by
REV. JOHN B. HARNEY, C.S.P.



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THE PAULIST PRESS
401 WEST 59TH STREET
NEW YORK 19, N. Y.



Nihil Obstat:

JOHN M. A. FEARNs, S.T.D.,

Censor Librorum.

Imprimatur:

✠ FRANCIS CARDINAL SPELLMAN,

Archbishop of New York.

New York, June 2, 1948.

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IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Deacidified

Peter: Prince of the Apostles

EVEN a cursory reading of the Gospels makes it clear that Peter was pre-eminent among the Apostles of Jesus Christ. All the Evangelists—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—in turn, pay far more attention to his thoughts and feelings, to his words and actions, and to the Lord's dealings with him, than to those of all the other Apostles.

This did not happen by accident. Nor is it an unimportant trifle. The Evangelists did not write in haste nor carelessly. At all times they had a definite, clearly understood and serious obligation in mind. While they wrote for men, to instruct and enlighten them, they wrote also for God; in His behalf, under His inspiration, in accordance with His designs, to make known His teachings, His counsels, His wishes, His plans, and His decrees. Their words are all integral parts of His revelation. They all, therefore, deserve and demand our careful consideration.

Chosen By Christ .

Faced with the fact of Peter's prominence in all the Gospels, we naturally ask how it came about, whether it is notably significant, and above all whether it places on the followers of Jesus Christ any clear, positive obligations. These are all vitally important questions. The right and complete answer to them is indispensable. It will bring home to us, clearly and unequivocally the mind and the will of our Blessed Lord, and thus enable us to take the straight, sure road to eternal life. Happily it is easy to find that answer. Jesus Christ has given it to us very plainly. Peter is pre-eminent among the Apostles, simply and solely because our Lord chose to honor him more than any other disciple

and Apostle, and to endow him with a greater power, authority and responsibility than He conferred on any other. He made him the chief of the Apostles, and in due time He made him His vicar.

New Name Promised

Of this intention Jesus Christ gave clear, plain notice on His first meeting with this disciple. It happened through the fraternal affection of Andrew, Peter's elder brother. At the moment he was a follower of John the Baptist. But when he heard John say of Jesus, Who was walking nearby: "Behold the Lamb of God" he and a companion followed the Lord to His home, and spent the night with Him. Next day Andrew looked for Simon and said to him: "We have found the Messias, that is, the Christ" and he brought him to Jesus. Then Jesus looking on him said: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas" (John i. 42). Quite probably neither he nor Andrew understood why the Lord thus promised him a new name. Still less did they grasp its significance. But they did know that He had not spoken at random, nor in vain. In time they would realize just what He meant.

Simon was the only disciple to whom Jesus gave a new name. It is true that He called James and John the sons of Zebedee, "Boanerges," that is, the "sons of thunder," but it seems plain that He was merely describing their character (Luke ix. 54). At any rate, though they are frequently mentioned in the Gospels, they are always and everywhere called James and John. It is quite different with the name Cephas or Peter, bestowed on Simon. Though his original name still appears in the Gospels and is generally used by our Lord, the new name is employed much oftener by the Evangelists.

Saint John ordinarily combines the old and the new, speaking of the Apostle as Simon Peter.

First In Every List

Another noteworthy fact is that the sacred writers in enumerating the Apostles, and in recording their words or actions, invariably mention Peter first. With the single exception of Judas Iscariot who is always placed last, they do not name the rest in exactly the same order (Matt. x. 2; Mark iii. 16; Luke vi. 14). Moreover, when Peter is mentioned in connection with any other Apostle he is usually singled out in one way or another as the leader or the more important. As a rule the presence of the others is merely indicated by such phrases as "Peter and the rest"; "Peter and the Apostles." He is never treated in this vague, anonymous fashion. When brought into the narrative he is always mentioned by name, either as Simon, or as Peter, or quite frequently as Simon Peter. Whether for praise or for blame he is always clearly identified.

His character may seem to some the main reason for this distinction. He was evidently a very impulsive man, quick to ask and to answer questions; almost always ready to express his opinions, his feelings and his convictions. Sometimes he spoke too hastily, as when he said to the Lord: "Thou shalt never wash my feet" (John xiii. 8). Sometimes too forcefully, as when he took the Lord to task for having said that He would have to go to Jerusalem to suffer many things and be put to death (Matt. xvi. 21). Sometimes too confidently as when he rashly contradicted the Lord's prophecy during the Last Supper that he would deny his Master that very night (Matt. xxvi. 35).

The Will of Christ

Peter's impetuosity however, must not be thought the sole nor even the chief reason why he is consistently set before us in the Gospels far more vividly than any other Apostle. That might account for the frequency of reference to him; but it does not explain the leadership, the deference, the honors, and the powers which were bestowed on him. For this prominence there is but one true and adequate explanation—the undeniable fact that Jesus Christ chose him from the very beginning of their relations to fill an unique and glorious role in His own redemptive work. The promise that he would be known by a new, highly significant and prophetic name, was but the first of manifold evidences that the Lord planned to associate this Apostle with Himself more intimately than any other. For lack of time and space we cannot now dwell on them at length nor even mention them all. Yet we must not wholly pass them by lest the gracious plans of Christ for Peter be underrated and their value for us be hid from our eyes. We will, therefore, note two of them.

First, what happened in the synagogue of Capharnaum about a year before our Lord's death, when He said that He would give to those who believed in Him true bread from heaven. It is not this promise in itself that we wish to consider now, but merely the challenging question that Jesus put to the Apostles when many who had been tentatively His disciples, rejected His teaching, turned their backs, and walked no more with Him (John vi. 68).

Peter Meets a Challenge

It was a solemn, decisive hour for the Apostles. Our Lord was not willing to let them take refuge in silence, to carry on

as if no serious issue had been raised, and to remain in His company without giving any sign or pledge of belief in his forcefully asserted promise. They had to show their colors. He put them to the test quietly: "Will you also go away?" The question was asked of all. It was Simon Peter alone who answered—the spokesman of the Twelve as always in critical situations: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God."

How like this situation at Capharnaum to that which arose later close to Caesarea Philippi. Here, by asking the Apostles: "Will you also go away?" He gave them an opportunity to declare their allegiance to Him. There, by asking: "Whom do you say that I am?" He gave them an even plainer opportunity to profess their faith in Him. On both occasions Peter alone replied; with a clear, unhesitating, ringing profession of belief in his Master, and in His divine Sonship. And this he did because he knew the truth about his Master better and more surely than they, not through flesh and blood but because the Father Who is in heaven had revealed it to him (Matt. xvi. 17).

Jesus Pays a Tax For Himself and Peter

Not long before His death, Jesus gave Peter another token and proof of close association with Him. The collectors of the Temple tax, who evidently realized his pre-eminence among the Apostles, had asked him: "Doth not your Master pay the didrachmas?" "Yes," he answered unhesitatingly. But when he had gone home, Jesus questioned him on the subject at once. "What is thy opinion, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth receive custom or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers?" "Of strangers," he replied.

“Then,” said Jesus, Who was Himself the Lord and Master of the Temple, “the children are free. But that we may not scandalize them, go to the sea and cast in a hook; and that fish which shall first come up, take; and when thou hast opened its mouth, thou shalt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee” (Matt. xvii. 26). The Lord’s linking of Himself with Peter in this connection may be thought a little thing in itself. Quite probably the disciple did not make much of it at the time. For all that, it should not be overlooked by one who wishes to have a clear realization of our Lord’s relations with Peter. Taken in conjunction with many other manifestations of His affection and confidence, it was, at least, an intimation that if and when greater honors and more important commissions were called for in the divine plans, they would almost surely be bestowed on Peter. Though consistency is despised by many who are unable to achieve it, and therefore, make a boast of being erratic, it was rightly valued by our Lord and was an outstanding feature of His life.

Unfolding of Christ’s Plans

Thus far we have dealt with only what might be considered minor indications of Peter’s pre-eminence among the Apostles. Of themselves they prove merely that he stood high in the Lord’s favor. They do not show that he was to be vested with distinctive powers and commissions which would raise him above his brother Apostles. The proof of this truth, however, is at hand in three separate and solemn declarations of our Blessed Lord. We will consider them in the order of their occurrence.

The first has been mentioned already, but briefly, without any attempt to show its full meaning and force. It begins

with the first words of Jesus Christ to Simon, the fisherman of Bethsaida in Galilee: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas, which is interpreted Peter" (John i. 42). At that time, the very beginning of His public life, our Lord did not tell this disciple why He was promising him a new name, nor what it meant. Apparently He did not explain these things until His life was close to its end. He and the Apostles were then in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi (Matt. xvi. 13). One day He asked them: "Whom do men say that the Son of man is?" On this occasion Peter was not the first to answer. He was content to let the others report what had been said in their hearing by different men who had spoken about Jesus. Their opinions were varied. Some said that He was John the Baptist just risen from his recent grave. Some that He was Elias, come back to the world; some that He was Jeremias; others more vaguely, that He was one of the Prophets.

The Apostles—Hesitant

Then Jesus said to them point blank: "But whom do you say that I am?" Thus challenged to speak for themselves, all the Apostles except Peter remained silent. They had acted in the same way on many other important occasions. They did not know what to say. They were not ready to commit themselves on the point that He had raised. Though inclined at one moment to believe in Him unreservedly because of the manifest and mighty miracles they had repeatedly seen Him work, they were hesitant at the next to trust Him wholeheartedly because practically all the prominent, learned, and reputedly holy men of the nation had condemned Him as an enemy of their traditions, especially of those which were designed to safeguard the holiness of the

Sabbath. They were too cautious to brave the anger of the Scribes and the Pharisees, though their Master had often held them up to ridicule and scorn, and had castigated them for their hypocrisy with the sternest words that ever fell from His lips.

Except Peter

Peter did not share the caution of his comrades. He promptly answered the Lord's question with the ringing tones of certainty: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

That answer echoed triumphantly through the courts of heaven. It thrilled the souls of the saved, who were waiting for the opening of its gates. It deepened the anguish of the fallen angels and of the lost souls. It reassured and strengthened the wavering Apostles.

The words were the words of Peter. But he had not spoken them at a guess, nor out of childlike enthusiasm, nor as a result of deep personal study. He had a better reason for his magnificent profession of faith—the revelation which the Heavenly Father had made to him, rather than to any of the rest. This is no mere surmise but a positive certainty vouched for by Jesus Christ: "Blessed art thou Simon Bar Jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven."

He Is Made the Rock

Naturally, our Lord was not content with a bare declaration of Peter's blessedness. It was but fitting and to be expected that He would Himself honor the disciple whom His Father had so signally honored, and would bestow on him an appropriate reward for his splendid profession of faith. Listen to the Lord's swift reply to Peter's inspired words:

“I say to thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” He had previously told this disciple that he would be *called* a rock. Now He told him that he *was* a rock in the strength and stability of his faith. Moreover, he was *the* rock on which Jesus, the Supreme Architect and Master Builder would erect His indestructible Church, with which the forces of evil would contend, but always in vain. “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

This was but the first of the prerogatives which the Lord had in mind for Peter. Continuing, He said: “I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

Given the Keys of Heaven

He who holds the key of a house or of a kingdom has it under his control. He is its master. He has the right and the power to open and to close its doors—to admit and to exclude those who may wish to enter. Where there is question of an earthly house or kingdom, that power, of course, is not absolute. It may be upset by either internal or external enemies. That cannot happen in the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter’s divinely bestowed authority will be divinely maintained forever.

Evidently the power symbolized by the keys of the kingdom might be mainly of a general and supervisory character, which would not necessarily or ordinarily take cognizance of minor details. Even these, however, Jesus wished to place directly in the hands of Peter. “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth it shall be bound also in heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven” (Matt. xvi. 19; xviii. 18; John xx. 23). A sweeping, a far reaching authority, stretching from earth to heaven, and assured of ratification in both realms. What greater author-

ity or power could be given to any man? It belonged to Jesus Christ by native right. No man could take it upon himself. No man could receive it as a gift from other men. But it could be given by Christ to the man of His choice. And it was given by Him as we have seen to Simon whom He surnamed Peter, the Rock.

These Gifts Concern Us

The solemn words He addressed to this disciple in the presence of all His Apostles on that fateful day are of grave and everlasting importance to us who have heard of Christ and have been given an opportunity to become acquainted with His plans and provisions for our spiritual welfare. They have been written down for our instruction. They bind us as forcefully as they bound those who first heard them. They have not been outgrown, nor outmoded, however much they have been ignored, and distorted, and minimized, for they are the very words of Jesus Christ. And He has told us that though heaven and earth shall pass away, making room for the new heaven and the new earth which are to come (Apoc. xxi. 1) His words shall not pass away (Luke xxi. 33).

Peter, Confirmer of the Brethren

Our Lord's second bestowal of unique responsibility and authority on Peter occurred during the Last Supper. All the Apostles were present. Even Judas was there. His traitorous intentions had been clearly revealed, but that he was the guilty man had been made known to only a few, as if the Lord wished to give him even then a chance to repent. Just when he went out on his treacherous errand is not definitely known. Possibly it was before the institution of the Holy

Eucharist. But it may not have been until after he had partaken of that priceless gift. Many of the Apostles were still wondering about the identity of the traitor. And they were also asking again which of them would be the greater, now that the Master was soon to leave them. Suddenly, Jesus, Who had been indirectly answering that very question turned to Peter, saying: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke xxii. 31). Here our modern English speech which does not ordinarily distinguish between the singular and the plural in its use of the word *you*, might mislead incautious readers and keep them from realizing the point and force of those words. Our Lord does not say, as some might imagine, that Satan was concentrating his hatred on Peter, but rather that Satan hated all the Apostles, and wished to frighten them, to scatter them, to rout them utterly. He had already won a total victory over one—the traitor who was even then hurrying to earn and to collect his thirty pieces of silver. He wished to win an equal victory over the rest. But Jesus would not let them be worsted by Satan. He would give His Apostles many helps. He would safeguard them in many ways. But especially would He protect them through Peter who had been so often their aid and spokesman in critical hours. "But I have prayed for *thee*" he continued "that *thy* faith fail not, and thou being once converted, confirm thy brethren." Let Satan now rage with his utmost fury. An invincible champion had been raised up to oppose and to defeat him. The heavenly Father had heard and had granted the prayer of His only-begotten Son in Whom He was well pleased. Peter, who had been previously made the Foundation of the Church against which Satan and his cohorts were to fight in vain, now had that commission ratified and

enlarged. Henceforth he was to be also the *Confrmer of his brethren*, their stay and their surety through all the trials and tempests that lay ahead.

With this answer to their self-seeking inquiries and this provision for their welfare, Jesus led His Apostles into the Garden of Olives. The hour for which He had longed was at hand. He was now about to pay the price of man's Redemption. In a little more than twelve hours it would be paid in full. He would have taken away the sting of death. He would have blotted out the handwriting of the decree that was against us (Col. ii. 14). And His tortured, mangled body would be lying at rest in a borrowed grave.

Christ's Final Gift to Peter

His work on earth was almost finished. There were but two things He still had to do. First, He had to put His victory beyond doubt and questioning by rising triumphantly from the grave; by staying a while on earth in His risen glory; and by manifesting Himself vividly to those disciples who were slow of faith and hard to convince. Then He had to give His flock a shepherd in His stead. He was about to go back to His place at the right hand of His Father, to be glorified with the glory which He had with Him before the world was (John xvii. 5). But His sheep were still to be on earth a little while, where the Wolf would try to catch and destroy them. Would He now leave them alone and unprotected on the chance that they might hide from the Wolf or be able to dodge him? Would He let them be taken over by hirelings, who surely would not take care of them, but would flee at the first sign of danger? Never would the Good Shepherd act thus. He had laid down His life for His sheep. He would not let them perish through neglect.

Though He would not be with them visibly much longer, before He went away He would give His lambs and His sheep—His whole flock—the young and the old, the followers and the leaders, a trustworthy, faithful shepherd, to feed, to guide, and to protect them all, without exception, in every hour of danger and of need, even to the consummation of the world.

Peter Chief Shepherd

This He did at the sea of Tiberias, better known as the Lake of Genesareth, only a few days before He ascended into heaven. The story is told graphically by Saint John in the last chapter of his Gospel (John xxi. 15-17). Thrice Jesus questioned Peter about his love for his Master; thrice Peter responded: "Thou knowest that I love Thee." Twice Jesus said in reply: "Feed my lambs"; the third time He said: "Feed my sheep."

With these words, the Good Shepherd Who had laid down His life for His sheep, and wished to preserve them all unto eternal life, entrusted His whole flock to Peter.

He knew, as God alone can know, what He was doing. He knew with divine certainty that the naturally frail and fallible human shepherd to whom He was entrusting all His sheep would be a true and faithful shepherd, not only for the short span of his own earthly life, but also through his lawful successors unto the consummation of all things. In appointing a shepherd of the flock He was not making transient, but final and abiding provision for its welfare. Peter, the immovable Foundation of the Church, the unailing Confirmer of all the brethren, was also to be the perennial teacher, protector, and Shepherd of Christ's lambs and sheep until they are all gathered into the everlasting home He has prepared for them.

Christ the Sponsor of Peter

Our brief study of the dealings of Jesus Christ with His disciple, Simon Peter, has made it evident that his pre-eminence among the Apostles was the direct result of the Lord's own words and actions. Whether they were meant merely as tokens of affection, or had a far deeper significance and actually conferred on him prerogatives and powers which made him second only to the Master, was for a long while a moot question among them (Mark x. 35). Though some of them probably did not seek it, nor even dream of it, doubtless no one of them would have rejected the high honor of being the *first* after the Master in His kingdom. At any rate, they were all annoyed and became indignant when James and John had their mother seek that privilege for them (Matt. xx. 20). It was not until the very night before Christ died (Luke xxii. 23 seq.) that they all realized, clearly and permanently, how He had settled that vexing problem for them. From that hour no Apostle ever asked again who was to be the *first* in His Kingdom.

During the Lord's earthly life they had all invariably accorded leadership to Peter when He had asked searching questions. In the same way, after He had ascended into heaven, they accorded leadership and even supreme authority to Peter when they were attacked by the chief priests and Pharisees, or were confronted with grave problems. As we will soon see, the Acts of the Apostles plainly and abundantly give testimony of that fact. Indeed many centuries went by, with their long train of sharp controversies, bitter schisms, and deadly heresies, before any Christian, even those who erred grievously about the Gospel of Christ, seriously questioned the teaching supremacy and definite authority of Peter, or of those who succeeded him as Bishops of

Rome, and thereby inherited all his divinely conferred prerogatives.

Protestantism Rejects Peter

In our days, however, the supremacy of Peter over the other Apostles, and the legitimate transmission of his authority to his successors are vehemently denied by millions who stoutly profess loyalty to Jesus Christ. They hold that Peter was never the *first* among the Apostles in the sense of having supreme authority as the Vicar of Christ. Some, though not all, grant that he had a limited local authority as Bishop of the City of Rome, and with it the rank and right of precedence incidental to residence in the imperial Capital, but they maintain, as if their eternal salvation depends upon it, that he never had supreme religious authority elsewhere, least of all through the length and breadth of the Roman Empire.

Is Tossed By Many Winds of Doctrine

Curiously enough, these men are unable to say whether our Lord ever made any clear and effective provision for the settlement of internal strife and schisms among His followers; for the detection and elimination of false doctrines; or for the maintenance of that unity which He prayed might be always characteristic of His disciples. From the earliest days of Christianity, and now more than ever, there has been need of a divinely established and divinely guaranteed agency by which men of good-will might come to an adequate knowledge of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even in the days of Saint Paul there were self appointed teachers who would not endure sound doctrine but turned their hearing from the truth (2 Tim. iv. 4). In every century they have

been followed by hosts of other men who also resisted the truth, erring themselves, and driving their followers into error. Was Jesus Christ ignorant of what these men were going to do and *have done*? Was He unable to protect His people against these false teachers? It would be folly, nay it would be blasphemy, to say or even to think that He could not take care of His lambs and His sheep even to the consummation of the world. It would be a deadly sin against Him and against the Holy Spirit of Truth to say that He did not make due and adequate provision for all their needs.

And Denies the Wisdom of Christ

What else indeed did He do, what else could He have meant to do but just that, when He said to Peter: "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18): "Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for *thee*, that *thy* faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, *confirm thy* brethren" (Luke xxii. 32): "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these? . . . Feed my lambs" (John xxi. 15).

From the earliest days of Christianity, those words have been taken as proof that although our Lord bestowed great power and authority on all the Apostles, He yet gave greater power and higher authority to Peter. And since it is certain that He had in His mind and heart the men and women of our day, and meant to provide for their spiritual welfare as richly and effectually as for those of the early Christian times, it has always been held, and will be held to the very end, that there has been no abrogation, no withdrawal, no curtailment of the power and authority which He gave to His Apostles, and pre-eminently to Peter. Men might tinker

with His Church; might try to tear it down; and might erect in its stead substitutes of their own wild designing. In spite of all their restless fury—it has been incessant, His Church was to stand forever, erect, unchanged, and indestructible. He had built it on a rock, and the gates of hell were never to prevail against it.

After Christ's Ascension

It has been pointed out in the Gospels that during the Lord's earthly life, in direct consequence of His words and actions, Peter enjoyed a notable pre-eminence among the Apostles. After His death and ascension into heaven, Peter did not sink into relative obscurity and insignificance. Quite the contrary! His leadership, as reasonable men would expect, became more pronounced. And as previously, it was fully recognized and ungrudgingly taken for granted by the other Apostles. This fact is so obvious that it is admitted by men who are keenly anxious to belittle him. We will therefore, make no further reference to mere indications of his pre-eminence, but will confine our attention to those passages in Saint Luke's inspired narrative which show plainly that Christ had actually given him supreme authority.

That was made evident even before the promised Holy Spirit of Truth came upon them. Straightway after the Lord's ascension into heaven, the Apostles returned from Mount Olivet to Jerusalem and went to the upstairs room in which they had previously lived together. There, in union with the women who had been close to the Lord in His last days on earth, with his brethren, and with Mary, His Mother, they spent much time in prayer. All told, they were about one hundred and twenty.

Peter Acts With Authority

Peter, rising up, said to them: "Men, brethren, the Scripture must needs be fulfilled which the Holy Ghost spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who was the leader of them that apprehended Jesus; who was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. . . . 'His bishopric let another take.' Wherefore of these men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, one of these must be made a witness with us of His Resurrection" (Acts i. 15-22).

Here we have a clear, explicit manifestation not only of Peter's leadership, but also of his *authority*. He is the first to address the whole assembled flock of Christ. He takes the initiative. He does not stand up merely to make a suggestion. He does not ask for opinions or advice. He simply tells them all, James, John, Andrew, and the rest of the Apostles, even Mary, the Mother of Jesus, plainly, positively, authoritatively, what has to be done, and at once, about filling the vacancy created in the Apostolic ranks by the treachery of Judas. He speaks with authority, but not arbitrarily. He gives a sound, convincing reason for his decision. It is a definite, official interpretation of David's inspired command: "His bishopric let another take" (Ps. cviii. 18).

With Humility

With that pronouncement he stopped. While he might have gone on, so far as we can see, to choose the new Apostle, alone and unaided, it was not necessary that he should. He knew that what he had declared an imperative obligation

would be done at once. The rest could be safely left to the judgment of his brethren. Moreover, in acting thus, in enabling them to play an active part in the selection of their new brother Apostle, he would avoid even the appearance of lording it over others, and would be following faithfully the Lord's counsel: "He that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger, and he that is the leader as he that serveth" (Luke xxii. 26). Thus they all together, we know not just how, "appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. . . . And they gave them lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven Apostles" (Acts i. 26).

Peter a Judge

A further proof of Peter's supreme authority was soon provided by two violators of religious discipline. Their story is told graphically in the fifth chapter of The Acts.

Though it was not obligatory, many of the new converts sold lands and houses which they owned, and laid the proceeds at the feet of the Apostles that they might provide for the maintenance of the poor and needy brethren. Two of the converts, Ananias and his wife, Saphira, sold a piece of land and gave a *part* of the price to the Apostles, but fraudulently held back the rest. Had they been honest and truthful about the transaction all would no doubt have gone well with them. But they cheated, and lied. Therefore, they were punished, swiftly and sternly (Acts v. 1-10).

This incident is of prime importance for a clear realization of Peter's power and authority in the new-born Church of Christ. The fraud of Ananias and Saphira concerned all the Apostles. It could have been referred—some may think it should have been referred—to them all for discussion and

appropriate action. Peter alone dealt with it. He put the offenders on trial; elicited the truth by his questions; pointed out the character and gravity of their guilt; and passed sentence on them. The sentence was immediately carried out—not by any direct, personal action on the part of Peter, but by God’s own intervention, Who thus approved and confirmed Peter’s verdict. Thus also He made it plain to the whole Church and to all who heard these things that Peter had received from the Lord *judicial* authority and *punitive power*, and had the right to exercise them both on his own initiative.

Peter Receives the First Gentile Converts

A less tragic and terrifying evidence of Peter’s supreme authority is set before us in the first reception of gentile converts. In the early days of the Church it was apparently taken for granted that the Gospel was meant exclusively for the Chosen people. The commission which our Lord had given to the Apostles at the beginning of their career seems to warrant that impression. “Go ye not into the way of the Gentiles, and into the City of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go ye rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matt. x. 5-6.) His first words to the Syro-Phenician woman who begged Him to cure her daughter confirmed that impression: “I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.” (Matt. xv. 24.) But that this was merely a brief, temporary arrangement He clearly indicated when He said to her: “Suffer *first* the children to be filled; for it is not good to take the bread of the children, and cast it to the dogs.” (Mark vii. 27.) Still more plainly did He indicate its temporary character, and the universal scope of His redemptive work when He

declared at the end of His life that "penance and remission of sins should be preached in His name, unto *all* nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke xxiv. 47.)

Though Paul has always been characterized as the "Apostle of the Gentiles," because he labored more than any other among them, and because he specifically affirmed that the preaching of the gospel to them had been committed to him, as preaching to the Jews had been committed to Peter (Gal. ii. 7) yet it was Peter who first received Gentiles into the Church. This did not happen on his initiative, nor even in accordance with his personal inclinations, but simply out of his obedience to direct instructions and orders given by the Holy Ghost. For the complete story one must read the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Here we must content ourselves with stating the bare fact that Peter was divinely enjoined to receive into the Church a Roman centurion of Caesarea, with his kinsmen and some special friends. While he was preaching to them the Holy Ghost fell on all who heard his words, and they began to speak with tongues, magnifying God. Thereupon Peter said to the faithful of the circumcision who had gone with him from Joppe to Caesarea: "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts x. 47-8.)

Peter Vindicates His Conduct

The news of these happenings soon reached Jerusalem. When Peter, a little later, reached that City, those who "were of the circumcision contended with him saying: why didst thou go in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them?" In reply Peter told them what had taken place in

Joppe and Caesarea. Then he asked: "If then God gave them the same grace, as to us also who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that could withstand God?" That question ended their murmuring, but only for a while, as we shall soon see. "Having heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God saying: God then hath also to the Gentiles given repentance unto life."

This story is of tremendous importance. It shows us clearly and forcefully that Peter had from God outstanding leadership and authority in all the affairs of the Church of Christ. On Pentecost he had thrown open the doors of salvation for all the Jews who were ready and willing to receive the grace of conversion. Now at Caesarea he opens those doors for the Gentiles. Not of himself alone did he do these things, nor out of his own inclination and wish, but by the will of God Who had chosen him beforehand to be the supreme Teacher and Shepherd of all Christ's lambs and sheep.

By his explanation of what he had done at Caesarea in receiving Cornelius and his friends into the Church, Peter temporarily silenced those Christians who criticized his decision and his conduct. Yet they did not all "hold their peace" for long. Zeal for the ordinances of Moses did not die out of Jewish breasts quickly. Paul, strenuous defender though he was of the rights of Gentile converts, yet yielded on one occasion to the clamor of Jewish Christians who insisted on the maintenance of the Mosaic rite of circumcision. He himself circumcised Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father. (Acts xvi. 3.) Temporizing tactics, however, before long proved unwise. Some who came down from Judea said to the brethren: "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be

saved." Paul and Barnabas spoke strongly to the contrary. At last it was decided that these two, along with some who disagreed with them, should go up to Jerusalem to consult with the Apostles and priests on this question. (Acts xv. 2.)

Peter Settled the Circumcision Debate

It was Peter who definitively settled the controversy. This is certain, though some writers who wish to belittle him, pretend that it was James, the bishop of Jerusalem, who presided over this gathering and in the end gave the death blow to this incipient heresy. The scriptural record of what happened decisively contradicts them. "And when there had been much disputing, Peter, rising up, said to them: Men, brethren, you know that in former days God made choice among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe. And God, Who knoweth the hearts, gave testimony, giving unto them the Holy Ghost, as well as to us. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why tempt you God to put a yoke on the necks of the disciples, which neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? But by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we believe to be saved, in like manner as they also." (Acts xv. 7-11.)

After these words of Peter there was no further discussion or debate. He had affirmed and established his right to speak with definitive authority; he had indicated the reasoning which underlay his judgment; he had rendered his decision. Nobody dissented. The case was ended. How briefly, yet how emphatically Saint Luke gives us this information. "All the multitude held their peace."

To be sure there was much subsequent conversation. Barnabas and Paul narrated at length what great signs and wonders God had wrought by them among the Gentiles. James also spoke, not in opposition, nor in modification, but in perfect harmony with Peter's clear claim of authority, and of his verdict. Everything else that he added, and everything else that was done by the Apostles and ancients had but one objective—the clear exposition and the effective promulgation of Peter's decision. (Acts xv. 15-29.)

All the Apostles Vested With Great Authority and Gifts

Before we bring to a close our brief study of the pre-eminence and supremacy of Peter among the Apostles, it will be necessary to remind ourselves of the tremendous power, authority and guarantees of divine assistance which Jesus Christ gave not only to him, but also to the rest of the Twelve. Otherwise, we will have an utterly onesided and gravely misleading view of our Lord's plans and of Peter's rightful place in His Kingdom.

First, we know from Saint Matthew, that when He called those disciples together, He gave them power to cast out unclean spirits, to heal all diseases and infirmities, and even to raise the dead to life. (Matt. x. 1-7.)

Next, we know that in sending them to preach, He gave them unlimited authority. He strictly obliged those to whom they went to receive them, and to listen to them. "Who-soever" He said "shall not receive you nor hear your words, going forth out of that house or City shake off the dust from your feet. Amen I say to you it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of Judgment than for that City." (Matt. x. 14-15.) That

command and threat together were an implicit promise that the preaching of the Apostles would be infallible.

Explicit Promise of Infallibility

He also gave them that guarantee explicitly: "Going therefore, teach ye all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. xxviii. 20.) "And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete that He may abide with you forever." (John xiv. 16.) "He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you." (John xiv. 26.)

He gave them power to forgive sin and also the right to refuse pardon at their discretion. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained." (John xx. 22-23.) "Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven. (Matt. xviii. 18.)

He gave them power to change bread and wine into His own body and blood. "Taking bread, He gave thanks, and broke, and gave to them saying: This is my body which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of me." (Luke xxii. 19.)

Finally, He gave them *legislative* power, as we may see from the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, verses 23, 28, 29; *judicial* power as is made clear by Peter's condemnation of Ananias and Saphira (Acts v. 1-11) and by Paul's excommunication of the incestuous Corinthian (1 Cor. v. 3) and *executive* power as is manifested by the direc-

tions and instructions which Paul gave to his beloved disciples Timothy and Titus whom he had made bishops.

All these powers and prerogatives were conferred by our Blessed Lord on all the Apostles; on the eleven out of the original twelve who had remained faithful; on Matthias who had been elected by men to replace the traitor; and on Saint Paul, who had been made an Apostle, not by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father. (Galatians i. 1.) Each Apostle could use those prerogatives on his own initiative, without consulting his brother Apostles, and without any obligation of seeking their approval. For this reason, many writers in the early ages of the Church, notably Saint Cyprian, attributed equality to the Apostles. Speaking of our Lord he says: "He gives to all the Apostles an equal power, and says 'As the Father sent me, I also send you.'" Again he writes: "Certainly the other Apostles also were what Peter was, endowed with an equal fellowship, both of honor and power." (De Unitate Ecclesiae, 3.)

Grave Questions

"Well then" some one may ask—the questions are obviously reasonable—"how could Peter be the *first* among the Apostles if Cyprian is right in saying that they were equal in honor and power? How could Peter have *supreme* authority, if each and every Apostle had an unquestionable right to teach and to act in a judicial capacity independently of him? Is it not ridiculous to speak of any Apostle as *first* or as *supreme* under those circumstances?"

No! An emphatic no is the right, true answer to that question. Though all the Apostles had and exercised every one of the tremendous powers which Christ had bestowed on them; though they all had a full and perfect right to

use those prerogatives without asking for anybody's consent or approval; though they were absolutely equal in that respect; yet Peter was the *first* among them and had greater authority than all of them together, a *supreme* authority, second only to that of Jesus Christ, and dependent on Him alone.

When Peter was made the Foundation of the Church, was given the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, was commissioned to Confirm his brethren, and was made Shepherd of the Lord's whole flock, he was given commissions which exceeded those of the other Apostles in scope, in responsibility, in authority, and in power. On each of those occasions there was given to him something more than had been conferred on him and on them when they were all made Apostles. Assuredly it was not anything different in character from the gifts they had all received, but it was an enrichment, a development, a complementary perfecting of their powers, and fitted him for tasks which were beyond their unsupported capabilities.

Peter's Prerogatives for the Church

While those gifts were bestowed on him alone, and plainly raised him above the other Apostles, they were not given to him for himself alone, nor for such paltry reasons as had once plagued some of them—the wish to be first, to be on the right hand and on the left in the Lord's Kingdom—but for the accomplishment of their mutual task, the growth and completion of Christ's Kingdom on earth.

So far as the Apostles were individually concerned there was no need of any supervisor, umpire or arbitrator. All of them had the gift of infallibility in their teaching. Those of them who wrote, including Saint Luke, who was not an

Apostle, wrote under the guidance and control of divine inspiration. There was, therefore, no danger, nor even a possibility, of their giving utterance to conflicting doctrines.

Moreover, in those first days after the Ascension, there were no contentions, no rivalries, no jealousies, no scramblings after honor, prestige, or power among them. Up to the night in which their Master was sold for thirty pieces of silver there had been a little of all that, but nothing very serious. That night, however, their self-seeking was quenched forever. There was not even an ember of it in their subsequent lives. They lived, and labored, and suffered thenceforward in perfect harmony—brethren in unity.

To Aid the Apostles

Yet it must not be thought that the extraordinary commissions and powers conferred on Peter had no bearing on the labors or responsibilities of the other Apostles. They were all partners in one mighty undertaking—the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ. While Jesus prayed especially for Peter at the Last Supper, that prayer was for their welfare as much as for his; they were all hated and threatened and endangered by Satan; they all needed to be strengthened—to be confirmed. They were able to teach and to preach infallibly. They had all been cured of their personal ambitions. What of it, if Satan could come along after a century, or five, or ten, or even fifteen and bring the Church of Christ tumbling down in ruins and bedeviled by a bedlam worse than that of Babel? If Satan could bring that about he would flatter himself that he had at last gotten the better of Michael and of Michael's God. And we could not prove him a liar. For he would not be a liar, if the Church of Christ could be made like Nineveh

and Babylon. Christ, however, took care of all that and of Satan when He prayed that Peter's faith might never fail. Satan runs away from Peter as a shivering rabbit from a hound. He who wished to be equal to God is whipped to his everlasting dungeon by a man.

Satan's Victories

Yet he has had his victories: Outside the immediate circle of the Apostles, there has not been unity and peace between Christians for any long while, possibly and probably for not even one short year. Quarrels, schisms, and heresies sprang up among them almost overnight. There is nothing much to be learned from a study of those unhappy events beyond the fact that the mind of man is restless, almost always in search of something new, almost always captivated by it for a while, and that his heart is generally fickle, though not quite so unstable as a weather vane in a shifting wind. For a realization of those truths, however, we do not need to scan the centuries. Our own provides us with ample evidence. For this reason we merely note the fact that when Christianity was young, and should have been fair and healthy, the germs of corruption were already busily at work within her frame even to the point of endangering her life.

We do not mention these facts to ask whether Jesus Who had said that the gates of hell would never prevail against His Church, realized the dangers with which it was to be confronted even in its infancy; whether He knew how to meet them; whether He was able to provide against them well and wisely; and above all, whether He has lived up to His solemn promise?

We who are of the Catholic Church know the answer to all these questions. We know also, with a certainty that

is from God, a certainty which we have not merited, but have, nevertheless, received from Him, just how He has accomplished all those wonderful works.

And so may all others who sincerely seek the truth, however much they may be puzzled now, or discouraged, or disheartened by the contradictory appeals and arguments of false teachers, who have, for a while, misled them. They have in their hands the Holy Scriptures in which they have been taught to believe. If they will but search them prayerfully they will be led to the knowledge of the truth. Though it is evident that they are not easy to understand, that there are in them many things which the unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction (2 Peter iii. 16), it is also true that they give clear, strong, vivid testimony in favor of the Church of Christ. It is a City seated on a hill. Fog, and mist, and storm clouds may hide it now and then, but not for long. Nor can it be destroyed.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has built it on an impregnable foundation of His own choosing and strengthening. He has knit its members together strongly by that disciple for whom *alone* He won the gift of unfailling faith by His omnipotent prayer. He has sheltered, guided, nourished, and protected all His sheep by that one Whom He set as the Shepherd over the whole flock. That one is Peter, the Foundation of the Church, the Confirmer of his brethren, their Supreme Shepherd. He is all these things to the Church of God, not of or by himself, but by the will and the everlasting decree of Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of faith. (Heb. xii. 2.) To Him, therefore, let us lift up our songs of praise and thanksgiving on earth, that we may rejoice with Him and praise Him forever in His heavenly Kingdom.



