

into the Church (Acts 11:1-18). When the issue of circumcision arose again at a meeting of Apostles and presbyters—the Council of Jerusalem, **Peter's voice again settled the dispute** (Acts 15:6-12 and 28-29).

Peter speaks through Leo.

The unique role of Peter continues in his successors. After the Catholic Church became legalized in 313, theological schools developed, and so did controversies. Some of the most difficult were about Jesus himself and the relationship between his divinity and humanity.

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Pope Leo the Great sent a letter that became known as the Tome of Leo in which he clearly and authoritatively stated the Catholic faith. When it was read, the bishops universally acclaimed, "Peter has spoken through Leo."

Inconsistent Popes

In the almost 2,000 years of Catholic Church history, there are examples of Popes whose actions have been inconsistent with the teaching of the Church. Sad but true. However, the behaviors of individual Popes, even if sinful, do not take away his leadership.

A prominent example of inconsistency occurred with the first Pope—Peter. It had been decided that Peter would continue to preach to the Jews and Jewish converts to Christ and that Paul would evangelize the Gentiles.

Then Peter acted inconsistently. Under pressure from some of the converts from Judaism who still thought men needed to accept significant parts of the Jewish laws including circumcision, Peter became inconsistent. Previously, he had been eating with the Gentile converts but under pressure began avoiding them. St. Paul describes this famous confrontation:

"But when I saw that they were not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas [Peter] before them all: "If you, though a Jew, live like the Gentiles, and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like the Jews?" (Gal 2:11-14).

Paul did not claim that Peter's inconsistency deprived him of his role as the visible head of the Church. And that is still the teaching of the Catholic Church. Clearly, the Church has always recognized the unique role of Peter and the Popes as part of God's plan to provide clarity of teaching throughout the centuries.

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Why Catholic?

Why should you or I be Catholic?

In other words, why should you or I believe what the Catholic Church teaches? More precisely, why should you and I believe that what the Catholic Church teaches is true?

Concern for the truth in the Gospels

A primary reason for a person to be a Catholic is because he or she shares the concern and love of Jesus for the truth.

Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, on trial for his life, "Are you a king?" Jesus answered, "You are saying it, I am a king. This is why I was born and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:37).

In an earlier dialogue with Jews who had come to believe in him, Jesus told them, "If you abide in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31-32).

At the Last Supper, Jesus told Thomas and the rest of the apostles, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me" (Jn 14:6).

Concern for the truth in the Epistles

In the Epistles of John, Jude, and Paul, the concern for the truth about Christ is expressed repeatedly and strongly.

Of special interest is St. Paul's condemnation of those saying they have received a special message that is contrary to the original teaching. "Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel to you other than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

Unity within the Church

Once a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the big questions deal with what Jesus wants, and he has made it clear that he wants unity within the Church. At the Last Supper Jesus prayed at length (all chapter 17 in the gospel of John) for unity among those who believe in him.

First, He prayed for the apostles: "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth. Even as you have sent me into the world, so I also have sent them into the world..." (Jn 17:17-18)

Then he prayed for the rest of us: "Yet not only for these do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me (Jn 17:20-21).

Note that last phrase, "that the world may believe that you have sent me." He repeats it two verses later—"that the world may know that you have sent me..." (17:23).

Why did Jesus establish a Church?

Jesus knew from the beginning that disunity among those who believed in him would undermine the credibility of his mission.

The unbeliever might use disunity as an excuse not to accept Christ. "You folks can't agree, why should I believe any of you?"

Thus, one clear reason why Jesus founded his Church was to provide a visible and continuing source for knowing the truth he taught. At present there are over 30,000 organizations calling themselves Christian but in disunity. This is not what the Lord Jesus wants.

Origins of the Catholic Church

When God established his covenant with the people whom we call the Jews, he changed the name of Abram to Abraham as a sign of God's promise that he would be the father of a great multitude (Gen 17:5).

When Jesus was ready to found his Church of the New Covenant, he asked the apostles, "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven. And I say to you, you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 16: 15-19).

The special role of Peter.

The foundation of the Church established by Christ himself is bound up with the establishment of Peter as the visible head of the Church. This becomes even more evident at the Last Supper and in the immediate post-Resurrection encounters of Jesus and the Apostles. It is also clear in the Acts of the Apostles beginning with the day of Pentecost.

At the Last Supper, Jesus prayed specifically for Peter even as he predicted Peter's betrayal.

And the Lord said, "Simon Peter, behold, Satan has desired to have all of you Apostles, that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you personally that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Peter then stated his unto-death loyalty, and Jesus predicted Peter's threefold betrayal. After that betrayal, Peter repented and wept.

After his resurrection Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" and Peter replied three times, "Yes Lord, you know I love you." Jesus then gave him a threefold mandate, "Feed my lambs... Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17).

Soon after the Ascension of Jesus into heaven, Peter **presided over the election** of Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1: 15-26).

On Pentecost, Peter was **the first to preach** the risen Christ to the Jews (Acts 2:14-41). Next, Peter was **the first to heal** "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" (Acts 3:1-6).

When Peter and John were arrested for their preaching, **Peter preached the risen Christ to the Jewish leaders** (Acts 4:1-12). Peter next exposed the dishonesty of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-10).

Believers would lay the sick on their pallets in the street to be **healed when Peter's shadow fell on them** (Acts 5:15). It was Peter who **passed judgment** on Simon Magus the sorcerer and led him to conversion (Acts 8:18-24).

Peter baptized the first Gentile converts (all of Acts 10). Peter defended that baptism to those who thought Gentiles had to be circumcised before entry