

## **Papal Infallibility**

### **Matthew 16:18**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.**"

Jesus tells Peter "Whatever **you** bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever **you** loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." It is interesting that Jesus did not say, "Whatever I bind in heaven will be bound on earth, I loose in heaven will be loosed on earth." Jesus is now giving Peter the authority to bind and loose people. He is given the ability to say with certainty what it takes to get to heaven and what is to be believed to be a Christian.

It is a charism the pope "enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (Luke 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter.

### **Conditions for an "Ex Cathedra" Statement**

According to the teaching of the First Vatican Council and Catholic tradition, the conditions required for ex cathedra teaching are as follows:

1. "the Roman Pontiff" (It can't be anyone else...Single Bishop, Priest, etc..)
2. "speaks ex cathedra" ("that is, when in the discharge of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, and by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority....")
3. "he defines" (There is a subject that is being addressed)
4. "that a doctrine concerning faith or morals" (It must be about faith and morals...not weather, football, carpet color, etc..)
5. "must be held by the whole Church" (The pope must make it clear that this is a universal teaching)

## Bishops and Infallible Teachings

In the Second Vatican Council we also see that Bishops, provided that while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with Peter's successor, and while teaching authentically on a matter of faith or morals, they concur in a single viewpoint as the one which must be held conclusively. This authority is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church. Their definitions must then be adhered to with the submission of faith" (Lumen Gentium 25).

This is not the same as the Pope who has the ability to speak infallibly by virtue of him being the Bishop of Rome (Pope). And, as Lumen Gentium states, "provided that while maintaining the bond of unity...with Peter's successor." (LG 25)

## Instances of Infallible Statements

- It is not even correct to hold that doctrine teaches that the Pope is infallible in everything he says. In reality, the invocation of papal infallibility is extremely rare.

Regarding historical papal documents, Catholic theologian and church historian Klaus Schatz made a thorough study, published in 1985, that identified the following list of ex cathedra documents:

1. "Tome to Flavian", Pope Leo I, AD 449 on the two natures in Christ, received by the Council of Chalcedon.
2. Letter of Pope Agatho, AD 680, on the two wills of Christ, received by the Third Council of Constantinople
3. Benedictus Deus, Pope Benedict XII, AD 1336, on the beatific vision of the just prior to final judgment;
4. Cum occasione, Pope Innocent X, AD1653, condemning five propositions of Jansen as Heretical.
5. Auctorem fidei, Pope Pius VI, AD 1794, condemning seven Jansenist propositions of the Synod of Pistoia as heretical.
6. Ineffabilis Deus, Pope Pius IX, AD 1854, defining the Immaculate Conception
7. Munificentissimus Deus, Pope Pius XII, AD 1950, defining the Assumption of Mary.

## Some Clarifications

An infallible pronouncement—whether made by the pope alone or by an ecumenical council—usually is made only when some doctrine has been called into question. Most doctrines have never been doubted by the large majority of Catholics.

Pick up a catechism and look at the great number of doctrines, most of which have never been formally defined. But many points have been defined, and not just by the pope alone. There are, in fact, many major topics on which it would be impossible for a pope to make an infallible definition without duplicating one or more infallible pronouncements from ecumenical councils or the ordinary magisterium (teaching authority) of the Church.

Some ask how popes can be infallible if some of them lived scandalously. This objection of course, illustrates the common confusion between infallibility and impeccability. There is no guarantee that popes won't sin or give bad example. (The truly remarkable thing is the great degree of sanctity found in the papacy throughout history; the "bad popes" stand out precisely because they are so rare.)

