



# THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

HIS HOLINESS, POPE FRANCIS  
THE 265TH SUCCESSOR OF SAINT PETER



## *Tu Es Petrus*

### **An American Is Pastor of the Universal Church**

Why is St. Peter considered the *chief of the apostles*, endowed with complete authority in Christ's Church? Moreover, why is the bishop of Rome called the *successor of Peter*, and therefore, "head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the pastor of the universal Church on earth"<sup>1</sup>? In the following article, I will attempt a brief *mystagogy* on St. Peter and the papacy (i.e., a scriptural and theological/spiritual reflection on these mysteries); may the Spirit fill these meditations (both my writing and your reading) with his grace.

#### **Kingdom of David, Kingdom of God**

In chapter seven of the Second Book of Samuel, David, king of Israel by divine favor, is moved to make a gift of love to God, Israel's true King:

When King David was settled in his palace, and the Lord had given him rest from his enemies on every side, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God dwells in a tent!" Nathan answered the king, "Go, do whatever you have in mind, for the Lord is with you." But that night the Lord spoke to Nathan and said: "Go, tell my servant David, "Thus says the Lord: Should you build me a house to dwell in? ...The Lord ... reveals that he will establish a house for you. ...I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. It is he who shall build a house for my name. And I will make his royal throne firm forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. ...Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever."<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the Lord, never to be outdone in generosity (for "all good giving and every perfect gift is from above..."<sup>3</sup>), establishes his everlasting covenant with the house of David of the tribe of Judah; henceforth, the *kingdom of David* would forevermore be known as the *Kingdom of God*.

Who, then, is David's heir, in whom God's Kingdom would "stand firm forever"? Jewish tradition identifies him as the Messiah,<sup>4</sup> i.e., "the Anointed" sovereign of God's Kingdom. Christian faith further recognizes him as Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph,<sup>5</sup> the Christ,<sup>6</sup> in whom all prophecy is fulfilled.<sup>7</sup>

How is God's Kingdom organized? According to the Prophet Isaiah, the leading official in the house of Judah (after the king himself) is the "master of the palace,"<sup>8</sup> i.e., the *chief steward* of the kingdom.<sup>9</sup> This is what Isaiah (speaking in the Lord's voice) says of him:

He shall be a *father* to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. *I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.*<sup>10</sup>

Naturally, one is led to ask: Has our Lord appointed a chief steward for the Kingdom of God? Amazingly, the answer is *yes!* In light of God's Word in Isaiah, our Lord's intentions are clear:

When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. *I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*"<sup>11</sup>

Thus the *Catechism* states:

Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." The "power of the keys" designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. ...The power to "bind and loose" connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles, and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

### **Breakfast by the Sea**

David, like Moses before him,<sup>13</sup> was a shepherd. In fact, he was out tending his flocks when the Prophet Samuel called him to the Lord's service and anointed him king of Israel.<sup>14</sup> This should not surprise us; after all, Israel's Lord, God, and King is shepherd of his people.<sup>15</sup> Thus Jesus calls himself "the good shepherd ... [who] lays down his life for the sheep."<sup>16</sup> This, then, is the *manner* of Jesus' kingship.

Indeed, after Simon Peter declares his faith in Jesus as Christ, our Lord discloses his *royal destiny*: "From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."<sup>17</sup> What a paradox! Christ Jesus, in whom God's kingdom "stands firm forever," is the *Crucified King*; the "son of David"<sup>18</sup> is king of lepers, miscreants, outcasts, sinners, and fools ... and Peter is *his* vicar! Unsurprisingly, Peter rejects this:

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you." [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, Peter is now "Satan,"<sup>20</sup> a *skandalon*<sup>21</sup> to his Lord! It would seem that Peter, chief steward of King Jesus, assumes they are on "career paths to success and worldly glory." But Jesus knows this is not to be.<sup>22</sup>

Jesus is no ordinary king, and his is no conventional kingdom. In order to "storm the gates of the underworld" (i.e., defeat the powers of sin and death), Jesus must become a *spectacle of humiliation and rejection* ... and therefore, as his chief steward and First Disciple, *so must Peter*. Peter understands this well, but, like so many "believers" (past and present), he refuses (at first) to accept God's Word. Nevertheless, Jesus is as clear as he is unrelenting: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."<sup>23</sup>

Commenting on this *Way of the Cross*, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, insists:

The same Peter who professed Jesus Christ, now says to him: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. I will follow you, but let us not speak of the Cross. That has nothing to do with it. I will follow you on other terms, but without the Cross." When we journey without the Cross,

when we build without the Cross, when we profess Christ without the Cross, we are not disciples of the Lord, we are worldly: we may be bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, but not disciples of the Lord.<sup>24</sup>

After the Resurrection, on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (in Galilee), Jesus and Peter have a discussion. Recalling Peter's earlier *declaration of faith*,<sup>25</sup> and his *threefold denial* of Christ on the night before Jesus' execution,<sup>26</sup> our Lord reaffirms Peter's authority, even as he elicits from Peter a *threefold declaration of love*:

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. He said to him, "*Feed my lambs*." He then said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "*Tend my sheep*." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was distressed that he had said to him a 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*."<sup>27</sup>

Jesus continues: "Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."<sup>28</sup> The following verse goes on to explain that it is in this manner (essentially, through his death) that Peter "would glorify God," thus offering the *supreme and perfect expression of love* for, in witness to, and (as chief steward of God's Kingdom) in imitation of, his Crucified Lord;<sup>29</sup> like the Good Shepherd, Peter would lay down his life for Christ's sheep.

### **The Successor of Peter and the Faith of the Roman Church**

Why is the Bishop of Rome called *the* Successor of Peter? Moreover, why is the pope "head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the pastor of the universal Church on earth"?

St. Peter is believed to have evangelized and founded churches throughout the eastern Mediterranean. For example, bishops of the See of Antioch<sup>30</sup> are recognized in Catholic, Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox tradition as "successors of Peter," insofar as Peter ministered there (A.D. ca. 37-ca. 53) after leaving Jerusalem.

However, according to the tradition of the Church, East and West, the First Disciple was martyred at Rome, bound to an inverted Latin cross, approximately A.D. 64-67. Therefore, if we wish to understand the spiritual foundations of the historical papacy, it is impossible to overestimate the significance of St. Peter's death at Rome. Fourth century Church historian Eusebius, quoting Caius, a Roman presbyter of the late second century, writes:

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.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, although St. Peter founded many churches, the Church of Rome enjoys primacy among the churches of God because Christian tradition has identified Rome as the site where the Apostle Peter gave his life in imitation of his Crucified Lord, unto heavenly victory (hence, "trophies"): indeed, the *high altar* of the Basilica of St. Peter at the Vatican marks the spot under which his bones rest (*literally*, the church is built upon Peter!). Furthermore, to add to Rome's honor, the "Apostle to the Gentiles,"<sup>32</sup> too, saw martyrdom within its precincts; the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls (on the *Via Ostia*) designates where this once-persecutor of Christians, who met the executioner's sword, was laid to rest for the veneration of the faithful.

For this reason, St. Irenaeus of Lyons (writing near the end of the second century) affirms:

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 preeminent authority*, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond doubt, Rome's "preeminent authority"<sup>34</sup> is her faith, *baptized in the blood* of her illustrious martyrs (including many of the earliest bishops of Rome), with Peter as the first martyred pope.

### **The Church of Rome and the Primacy of Charity**

There is another dimension to Roman primacy. St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, in his *Letter to the Romans* (A.D. c. 107), describes their Church as "...worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of the highest happiness, worthy of praise, worthy of obtaining her every desire, worthy of being deemed holy, and which *presides over love*...."<sup>35</sup> "Presides over love"<sup>36</sup> may be translated "holds the chief place in love" or "ranks first in charity." In any case, what does St. Ignatius mean, and why does he shower such praise on the Church of Rome? In the words of the great French Orthodox lay theologian (and friend of Blessed John Paul II), Olivier Clément:

The "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic" Church is fully manifest in the Eucharistic congregation presided over by the bishop.... As the image of Christ the bishop gathers the local people together to form a Eucharistic body. The bishop therefore incorporates the Church. But the Church equally incorporates the bishop, who is the servant of her communion....

These Eucharistic congregations combine with one another to form the universal Church, since there exists through time and space a single Eucharist celebrated by Christ, our High Priest. This unity of the many ... takes effect around centers of communion that have the "care," that is, the responsibility of circulating information, witness, life and love amongst local congregations. For a local congregation only shows the unity of the Church only in so far as it is in communion with all the others, just as the divine persons exist in one another....

These "centers of harmony" are arranged hierarchically from the region (the ecclesial province with its metropolis) to the patriarchate which can be either an area of civilization or, in the modern age, a nation. Already at the beginning of the second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch in the prologue to his *Letter to the Romans* praises the vocation of the Church of Rome to exercise a universal oversight to ensure the communion of all the Churches. He calls the Bishop of Rome "the person in charge of charity." St. Irenaeus specifies the role of this Church as the privileged witness of the apostolic Tradition.<sup>37</sup>

Contrary to popular (albeit, mistaken) opinion, the pope is not a "super-bishop"! The pope is and remains *bishop of the local Church* of Rome. In his first words from the loggia, to the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square to welcome their new Shepherd, Pope Francis said, "You know that it was the duty of the conclave to give Rome a bishop.... The *diocesan community of Rome* now has its bishop. Thank you!"<sup>38</sup>

However, confirming St. Ignatius of Antioch's teaching concerning the *unique status* of the Church of Rome (and her bishop) among all the churches, Pope Francis continued:

And now, we take up this journey: bishop and people. This journey of the *Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the churches*. A journey of fraternity, of love, of trust among us.

Let us always pray for one another. Let us pray for the whole world, that there may be a great spirit of fraternity. It is my hope for you that this journey of the Church, which we start today ... will be fruitful for the *evangelization of this most beautiful city*.<sup>39</sup>

While Pope Francis asserts that "charity begins at home," inasmuch as he is the Bishop of *Rome* (therefore, he speaks of "the evangelization of this most beautiful city"), he also affirms that, as *the* Successor of Peter, he is Shepherd of the Universal<sup>40</sup> Church, presiding over her in a *Eucharistic communion* of fraternal love.

### ***Tu Es Petrus: The Mystery of Peter's Successor Today***

*Tu es Petrus*:<sup>41</sup> So the choir chants at the Inauguration Mass of a new pope. Notice, the Bishop of Rome is not the successor of the man who preceded him in office, but the Successor of *Peter* ... indeed, he is mystically identified with St. Peter himself.<sup>42</sup> Why is this so?

As indicated earlier, our Lord builds his Church, God's Kingdom, upon the Rock of Peter's person and faith. St. Peter, then (along with Sts. James, John, Paul,<sup>43</sup> and the other Apostles<sup>44</sup>), remains the Church's *perpetual foundation*. Moreover, as chief steward of the Kingdom, St. Peter's vocation is *unique and irreplaceable*. As Jesus says to the Twelve, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."<sup>45</sup>

However, while Peter lives with Christ, Mary, Joseph, John the Baptist, the Apostles, and all the saints of heaven, his *office* (or function) and *chair* (or teaching and ruling authority) continue to exist on earth. In this sense, then, the popes, the bishops of Rome, are "Successors of Peter." In other words, while St. Peter carries on his ministry from heaven, his successors are tasked with the chief stewardship of God's Church on earth *only insofar as they remain* in Peter's office and upon his chair. Typically, then, it is only through death that a pope is discharged of his responsibilities. However, as we have seen on occasion throughout history (and most recently, during the pontificate of Benedict XVI), it is possible for the pope to relinquish, freely, his responsibilities as Successor of Peter, at which time the chief stewardship of God's Church, including the divine/ecclesiastical privileges granted all Peter's successors (namely, *primacy of jurisdiction*, and, in special cases, the singular exercise of the *Church's infallibility*), "transfer" to the next bishop of Rome.

Nevertheless, there is something more to the mystery of St. Peter and his successors than their privileges and responsibilities, however they may be defined. St. Peter was called not merely to fulfill responsibilities (even, arguably, the most privileged in God's Kingdom), but to holiness: the *highest faith, the purest love, and the most exacting imitation* of the Crucified and Risen Christ.

This should make us pause. If St. Peter is granted certain privileges and responsibilities as an Apostle and as chief steward of the king, Christ Jesus, it is only so that we, the faithful, might better understand *our calling* as disciples. What does this mean? Let us consider what our Lord teaches about the nature of Christian stewardship:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.<sup>46</sup>

What kind of King is this, who "did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life"? And yet, if the King is servant of all, what, then, is required of his subjects?

Jesus' notion of the service of Christian stewardship is not merely a high-sounding ideal or an abstract concept; to drive the point home, at the Last Supper, our Lord takes on the duties of a slave:

So, during supper, *fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God*, [Jesus] rose from supper and took off his outer garment. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. He came to Simon Peter who said to him, "Master, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing, you do not understand now, *but you will understand later*."<sup>47</sup>

What a moving passage! Notice, the text clearly states that our Lord undertakes this most menial of tasks, "fully aware" of his identity, his status, and his command. Put yourself at the scene: our Lord, God, and Savior ... washing the day's dirt and grime ... off *your* feet. Can you understand Peter's reaction? (Remember: Peter knows himself to be *this* King's chief steward. If the King is as a slave, what, then, must the "Prince of the Apostles" be? And what of the latter's successors? Indeed, *what about you?*)

Ultimately, the mystery of St. Peter and the papacy is, from start to finish, the *mystery of the service of Christian love*, even to the point of humiliation, even unto the Cross. The privileges and responsibilities of St. Peter (and, by extension, his successors) are utterly meaningless outside this context; after all, they are special shares in the *Mystery of Christ*, who gave "his life as a ransom for many."

Again, Pope Francis highlights this mystery at his Inauguration Mass:

Today, together with the feast of Saint Joseph, we are celebrating the beginning of the ministry of the new Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, which also involves a certain power. Certainly, Jesus Christ conferred power upon Peter, but what sort of power was it? Jesus' three questions to Peter about love are followed by three commands: feed my lambs, feed my sheep. *Let us never forget that authentic power is service, and that the Pope too, when exercising power, must enter ever more fully into that service which has its radiant culmination on the Cross*. He must be inspired by the lowly, concrete and faithful service which marked Saint Joseph and, like him, he must open his arms to protect all of God's people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important.... Only those who serve with love are able to protect!<sup>48</sup>

While every pope, without exception, receives the privileges and responsibilities of office so long as he occupies Peter's chair, history shows that not every pope has understood the sublimity of his call to *live* the Mystery of Christ (Love) Crucified. This, while scandalous, should not surprise us; after all, St. Peter himself, while Vicar of Christ, is also a man. Indeed, who among us does not sin, or shrink from the demands of the Gospel? Are we all *that different* from St. Peter and his successors in their failings? Truly, what is most important is that Peter *does* "understand later"; likewise, with few exceptions, each pope (who, in spite of his sinfulness, *always* maintains the integrity of the faith), *does* "take up his cross, and follow [our Lord]"—*and so must we*.

It is for this reason that every man called to the papal ministry (again, without exception) is called to become, like St. Francis of Assisi<sup>49</sup> (after whom the pope is named), the very *icon* of Crucified Love. Likewise, if the pope is granted unique privileges and responsibilities, it is so that he might minister to *every* servant in God's Kingdom, in our journey to holiness: to transformation in Christ Crucified, in self-giving/sacrificing Love.

***My wish is that all of us, after these days of grace, will have the courage, yes, the courage, to walk in the presence of the Lord, with the Lord's Cross; to build the Church on the Lord's blood which was poured out on the Cross; and to profess the one glory: Christ crucified. And in this way, the Church will go forward.***<sup>50</sup>

– Pope Francis

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, 331.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 11-14, 16.

<sup>3</sup> James 1:17.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew: *Ha'Mashiach*.

<sup>5</sup> John 1:45.

<sup>6</sup> Greek: *Ho Christos* ("the Anointed One").

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Luke 24:27.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 22:15.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Genesis 41:33-46.

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 22:21-22.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 16:13-19.

<sup>12</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 553.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Exodus 3.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Psalm 23, et. al.

<sup>16</sup> John 10:11.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 16:21.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 1:1, et. al.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 16:22-23.

<sup>20</sup> Hebrew: *Ha'Satan* ("the Adversary").

<sup>21</sup> "Obstacle," "snare," or "stumbling block" (Greek).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Wisdom 1-5.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 16:24.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily*, "Missa pro Ecclesiae" with the Cardinal Electors, 14 March 2013.

<sup>25</sup> In John's gospel, this occurs in 6:68-69.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. John 18:15-18, 25-27.

<sup>27</sup> John 21:15-17.

<sup>28</sup> John 21:18.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. John 15:13.

<sup>30</sup> There are five: Antiochian Orthodox, Maronite Catholic, Melkite Catholic, Syrian Catholic, and Syrian Orthodox.

<sup>31</sup> *Ecclesiastical History* II.25.7.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Galatians 2:8.

<sup>33</sup> *Against Heresies* III.3.2.

<sup>34</sup> Latin: *Potentiolem principalitatem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Prologue*.

<sup>36</sup> Greek: *Prokathemene tes agapes*.

<sup>37</sup> Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism* (New City Press, 1996), 118-119.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Blessing*, "Urbi et Orbi," 13 March 2013.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>40</sup> Greek: *katholikos*.

<sup>41</sup> "You are Peter" (Latin).

<sup>42</sup> St. Leo I (A.D. 440-461), the first pope surnamed "the Great," powerfully experienced this "mystical identification" with St. Peter.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Galatians 2:9.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Ephesians 2:20, Revelation 21:14.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 19:28 (RSV); cf. Luke 22:30, Revelation 4:4, 11:16.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 20:25-28.

<sup>47</sup> John 13:2-7.

<sup>48</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily*, *Mass for the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry*, 19 March 2013.

<sup>49</sup> St. Francis was the first person known to have received the *stigmata*, i.e., bodily marks resembling the wounds of the crucified Jesus.

<sup>50</sup> Pope Francis, *Homily*, "Missa pro Ecclesiae" with the Cardinal Electors, 14 March 2013.

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## Study Guide

### General Overview:

The following study guide for "*Tu Es Petrus: An American Is Pastor of the Universal Church*" has been designed as a pastoral and catechetical tool for use within small discussion groups. It may be used in multiple settings such as parish council, social ministry, or teacher meetings, etc., or gatherings devoted exclusively to the study of the document. It is suggested that the leader encourage the participants to read the document in advance, and provide them with questions (listed on page 3) pertaining to its contents. These questions can serve as matter for initial reflection and discussion. Leader and participants may then gather together to discuss the document during an hour of reflection on the spiritual meaning of the Petrine Ministry.

### Opening Prayer:

(As we embark on our study of "*Tu Es Petrus: An American Is Pastor of the Universal Church*," let us begin with a prayer from Servant of God, Pope Paul VI.)

Lord, I believe:

I wish to believe in you.

Lord, let my faith be full and unreserved,  
and let it penetrate my thought,  
my way of judging Divine things and human things.

Lord, let my faith be joyful  
and give peace and gladness to my spirit,  
and dispose it for prayer with God  
and conversation with my brothers and sisters,  
so that the inner bliss of its fortunate possession  
may shine forth in sacred and secular conversation.

Lord, let my faith be humble and not presume  
to be based on the experience of my thought and of my feeling;  
but let it surrender to the testimony of the Holy Spirit,  
and not have any better guarantee than in docility to Tradition  
and to the authority of the Magisterium of the Holy Church.

Amen.



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Reading 1 (Is 22:21-22): (The pope "shall be a father to the inhabitants" of the household of God, the Church.)

He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder; when he opens, no one shall shut, when he shuts, no one shall open.

Reading 2 (Mt 16:18-19): (The Successor of Peter has received "the keys to the kingdom of heaven," the authority to bind and loose.)

And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Reading 3 (Mt 20:25-28): (The Bishop of Rome, as Pastor of the Universal Church, is called "to serve and to give his life ... for many.")

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Discussion Questions (see page 3)

Closing Prayer: (We are all servants, of God and of one another, and the pope is "Servant of the Servants of God.)

Father, source of eternal life and truth,  
give to your shepherd, Pope Francis,  
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 bishop of Rome, successor to the apostle Peter, vicar of Christ,  
pastor of the universal Church, and servant of the servants of God,  
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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Discussion Questions

1. What and who is the *Messiah*, and why is he known as the *Son of David*?

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2. In *ancient times*, what was God's Kingdom? What is God's Kingdom *today*?

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3. Who is the *chief steward* of God's Kingdom? What *service* does he offer? Why and how does he offer it?

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4. Why is the Bishop of Rome (the pope) known as *the* Successor of Peter? What is the relationship between the pope's *authority* (i.e., his *ministry* as Pastor of the Universal Church), St. Peter's *vocation*, and the *Cross* of Jesus Christ?

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5. "Jesus is no ordinary king...." What are the implications of Jesus' *manner* of kingship *for you*, given *your* profession of *faith* in Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God"?

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