



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We hear in the Gospel today about the institution of the Papacy – Jesus changes Simon’s name to Peter, which means “Rock” and He says: “upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16: 18). Biblical scholars believe Jesus chose to go to Caesarea Philippi because of the huge rock that was there and the symbolism of Peter and his confession of faith being not just a pebble, but a huge rock!



The rock at Caesarea Philippi – note the people at the entrance of the cave to get proper scale

Jesus knew that we can so easily get things wrong. Even with the Biblical texts given to us, it is easy to misinterpret what is written. Take for instance the phrase, “I never said you stole money.” Six small words, and I can think of at least six different ways to interpret it. Jesus, knowing this, gave us His Body, the Church (note, that she is an organism, NOT an organization!). The teaching arm of the Church (the Magisterium) helps us to know God’s will for our lives even into the 21st century. And the Church is built upon the solid rock of Peter – that he can bind and loose (having authority on earth, *and in heaven* [cf. Mt 16:19]), and the gates of the netherworld (hell) shall not prevail (cf. Mt. 16:18)!

You see, when we say that the Pope is infallible when he speaks from his authority as Pope on faith and morals, it is not meant to be a imposition of authoritarianism, but rather a gift from God! It is not saying that the pope will be a saint... many have not been (though, we have had many saintly popes in the last century). Nor is this teaching saying that everything he says is always infallibly correct: for instance, when giving interviews and speaking off the cuff, or when he speaks on practices and rituals. But it tells us that despite the weakness of the man in the position as pope, GOD HIMSELF guarantees the truth of the things that matter most – when he speaks with proper authority on things of *faith* (for instance the Dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption), and on *morals* (right living, good and evil, for instance the evil of contraception, see *Humanae Vitae*). He gives us this gift because, as one of my professors always said, we’re as dumb as a bag of hammers, and we need this surety!

God Himself gives us this gift. Let us ask Him for the grace to receive this gift with docility to the will of God, and to show proper respect for the sinful and flawed man who hold this office as Pope.