

CHAIR OF ST. PETER – *St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican*



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BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 22 February 2006

"On this rock I will build my Church"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, the Latin-rite liturgy celebrates the Feast of the Chair of St Peter. This is a very ancient tradition, proven to have existed in Rome since the fourth century. On it we give thanks to God for the mission he entrusted to the Apostle Peter and his Successors.

"Cathedra" literally means the established seat of the Bishop, placed in the mother church of a diocese which for this reason is known as a "cathedral"; it is the symbol of the Bishop's authority and in particular, of his "magisterium", that is, the evangelical teaching which, as a successor of the Apostles, he is called to safeguard and to transmit to the Christian Community.

When a Bishop takes possession of the particular Church that has been entrusted to him, wearing his mitre and holding the pastoral staff, he sits on the *cathedra*. From this seat, as teacher and pastor, he will guide the journey of the faithful in faith, hope and charity.

So what was the "Chair" of St Peter? Chosen by Christ as the "rock" on which to build the Church (cf. Mt 16: 18), he began his ministry in Jerusalem, after the Ascension of the Lord and Pentecost. The Church's first "seat" was the Upper Room, and it is likely that a special place was reserved for Simon Peter in that room where Mary, Mother of Jesus, also prayed with the disciples.

Subsequently, the See of Peter was Antioch, a city located on the Oronte River in Syria, today Turkey, which at the time was the third metropolis of the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria in Egypt. Peter was the first Bishop of that city, which was evangelized by Barnabas and Paul, where "the disciples were for the first time called Christians" (Acts 11: 26), and consequently where our name "Christians" came into being. In fact, the Roman Martyrology, prior to the reform of the calendar, also established a specific celebration of the Chair of Peter in Antioch.

From there, Providence led Peter to Rome. Therefore, we have the journey from Jerusalem, the newly born Church, to Antioch, the first centre of the Church formed from pagans and also still united with the Church that came from the Jews. Then Peter went to Rome, the centre of the Empire, the symbol of the "Orbis" - the "Urbs", which expresses "Orbis", the earth, where he ended his race at the service of the Gospel with martyrdom.

So it is that the See of Rome, which had received the greatest of honours, also has the honour that Christ entrusted to Peter of being at the service of all the particular Churches for the edification and unity of the entire People of God.

The See of Rome, after St Peter's travels, thus came to be recognized as the See of the Successor of Peter, and its Bishop's "cathedra" represented the mission entrusted to him by Christ to tend his entire flock.

This is testified by the most ancient Fathers of the Church, such as, for example, St Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, but who came from Asia Minor, who in his treatise *Adversus Haereses*, describes the Church of Rome as the "greatest and most ancient, known by all... founded and established in Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul"; and he added: "The universal Church, that is, the faithful everywhere, must be in agreement with this Church because of her outstanding superiority" (III, 3, 2-3).

Tertullian, a little later, said for his part: "How blessed is the Church of Rome, on which the Apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood!" (*De Praescriptione Hereticorum*, 36).

Consequently, the Chair of the Bishop of Rome represents not only his service to the Roman community but also his mission as guide of the entire People of God.

Celebrating the "Chair" of Peter, therefore, as we are doing today, means attributing a strong spiritual significance to it and recognizing it as a privileged sign of the love of God, the eternal Good Shepherd, who wanted to gather his whole Church and lead her on the path of salvation.

Among the numerous testimonies of the Fathers, I would like to quote St Jerome's. It is an extract from one of his letters, addressed to the Bishop of Rome. It is especially interesting precisely because it makes an explicit reference to the "Chair" of Peter, presenting it as a safe harbour of truth and peace.

This is what Jerome wrote: "I decided to consult the Chair of Peter, where that faith is found exalted by the lips of an Apostle; I now come to ask for nourishment for my soul there, where once I received the garment of Christ. I follow no leader save Christ, so I enter into communion with your beatitude, that is, with the Chair of Peter, for this I know is the rock upon which the Church is built" (cf. *Le lettere* I, 15, 1-2).

Dear brothers and sisters, in the apse of St Peter's Basilica, as you know, is the monument to the Chair of the Apostle, a mature work of Bernini. It is in the form of a great bronze throne supported by the statues of four Doctors of the Church: two from the West, St Augustine and St Ambrose, and two from the East: St John Chrysostom and St Athanasius.

I invite you to pause before this evocative work which today can be admired, decorated with myriads of candles, and to say a special prayer for the ministry that God has entrusted to me. Raise your eyes to the alabaster glass window located directly above the Chair and call upon the Holy Spirit, so that with his enlightenment and power, he will always sustain my daily service to the entire Church. For this, as for your devoted attention, I thank you from my heart.

To special groups

I warmly welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims present at this Audience. In particular, I greet the members of the *Pro Oriente* Syriac Commission, and also the members of the British Parliament. Today, I invite you all to visit the specially decorated monument to the "cathedra" of Peter, in the Basilica. There, I ask you to pray that the Holy Spirit may enlighten me and support me in my service to the Church. Thank you and may God bless you all!

Lastly, my thoughts go to the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Dear sick people, offer to the Lord your moments of trial so that they may open the doors of hearts to the proclamation of the Gospel. And may you, dear newly-weds, always be witnesses of the love of Christ who has called you to achieve a common project of life.

The Feast of the Chair of St Peter is a particularly suitable day for announcing that next 24 March I will be holding a Consistory at which I will appoint new Members to the College of Cardinals. It is appropriate to make this announcement on the Feast of the Chair because the task of Cardinals is to sustain and assist the Successor of Peter in carrying out the apostolic office that has been entrusted to him at the service of the Church.

It is not by chance that in ancient ecclesiastical documents the Popes described the College of Cardinals as "*pars corporis nostri*" (cf. F.X. Wernz, *Ius Decretalium*, II, n. 459). In fact, the Cardinals form a sort of Senate that surrounds the Pope and of which he avails himself in carrying out the tasks connected with his ministry as the "lasting and visible source and foundation of the unity both of faith and of communion" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 18).

With the creation of the new Cardinals, therefore, I intend to bring to 120 the number of Members Electors of the College of Cardinals, as fixed by Pope Paul VI of venerable memory (cf. AAS 65, 1973, p. 163).

The following are the names of the new Cardinals:

- 1.- **Archbishop William Joseph Levada**, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith;
- 2.- **Archbishop Franc Rodé, C.M.**, Prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life;
- 3.- **Archbishop Agostino Vallini**, Prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura;
- 4.- **Archbishop Jorge Liberato Urosa Savino** of Caracas, Venezuela;
- 5.- **Archbishop Gaudencio B. Rosales** of Manila, the Philippines;
- 6.- **Archbishop Jean-Pierre Ricard** of Bordeaux, France;
- 7.- **Archbishop Antonio Cañizares Llovera** of Toledo, Spain;
- 8.- **Archbishop Nicholas Cheong-Jin-suk** of Seoul, Korea;
- 9.- **Archbishop Sean Patrick O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap.**, of Boston, U.S.A.;
- 10.- **Archbishop Stanisław Dziwisz** of Krakow, Poland;
- 11.- **Archbishop Carlo Caffarra** of Bologna, Italy;
- 12.- **Bishop Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, S.D.B.**, of Hong Kong, China.

I have also decided to raise to the dignity of Cardinal three ecclesiastics who are older than 80, out of esteem for the services they have rendered to the Church with exemplary faithfulness and admirable dedication.

They are:

1. **Archbishop Andrea Cordero Lanza di Montezemolo**, Archpriest of the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls;
2. **Archbishop Peter Poreku Dery**, Archbishop emeritus of Tamale, Ghana;
3. **Fr Albert Vanhoye, S.J.**, the former praiseworthy Rector of the Pontifical Institute the Biblicum, and Secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: a great exegete.

The Church's universality is clearly reflected in the group of new Cardinals. Indeed, they come from various parts of the world and carry out different offices at the service of the People of God. I ask you to raise to God a special prayer to the Lord, so that he will grant them the necessary graces to carry out their mission generously.

As I said at the outset, I will be holding the announced Consistory next 24 March and the following day, 25 March, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, I will have the joy of presiding at a solemn Concelebration with the new Cardinals. I also invite all the Members of the College of Cardinals to take part; I have in mind to organize a meeting with them for reflection and prayer on the previous day, 23 March.

Let us now end with the singing of the *Pater Noster*.