



The **PAPACY**

The prophet Zechariah taught that without a shepherd the sheep will scatter (Zech. 13:7). Does this mean Christians are hopeless since our shepherd, Jesus, is no longer with us?

Fortunately, we are not sheep without a shepherd. Jesus gave us a pope to be his representative on earth, guiding and protecting his flock until he comes again.

The first pope was St. Peter. At the very end of the Gospel of John, Jesus gives Peter the charge to feed his sheep (21:15-17). From that point on, Peter had a unique role: the sheep belonged to Jesus the Good Shepherd, but Peter had the special job of nourishing them in faith.

In the Bible we see Peter exercising this special role on several occasions. For example, he made pastoral visits—to oversee the sheep in the fields—to Christians dispersed in all areas of the known world (Acts 9:32). He also led Christ's flock to truth when he capped the debate concerning whether Gentile converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised (Acts 15:1-12).

So that Christians wouldn't lose their shepherd when Peter died, the office of the papacy has been passed from one man to another ever since, continuing in unbroken succession for nearly 2,000 years. Each pope has been commissioned to lead and care for God's people as Jesus' special representative—the vicar of Christ. Just as Jesus prayed for Peter specifically, that his faith wouldn't fail (Luke 22:32), so do Peter's successors benefit from God's special grace and the prayers of the whole Church.

The papacy got its name because the pope is not only a shepherd but also a spiritual father. We know this because in addition to telling Peter to feed his sheep, Jesus also gave him the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19). In the Jewish tradition, this signified an institution in the Davidic kingdom known as the royal steward, an official who was considered a "father" of the kingdom's inhabitants (Isa. 22:15-22). Jesus' gift of the keys means that Peter (and his successors) was to lead the Church as a spiritual father—a papa or pope.

We need not be afraid of scattering without a shepherd. Jesus has promised for all generations that through the papacy his sheep will still be fed, protected, and guided into truth.

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