

How can the Pope be infallible if he is an ordinary, sinful man?

The most important biblical text supporting the papacy, but not the only one, is Matthew 16:13-:18:

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.

Peter is such a common name nowadays that naming someone Peter doesn't seem unusual in any way. But at the time of this discussion Peter was rarely if ever used as a name. Peter means "rock" so when Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter it would be like if someone today were to be named "Strength" or "Courage." It was something so unusual, and would stand out so much, that it was clear that something special was meant by this name. So Simon son of Jonah, an ordinary man, was made by Jesus into the Rock upon which the church would be built. One man was meant to be at the center of the church, to be the key leader of the Church. It would make no sense for this to be

something that only existed at the very beginning of the church. God's plan has always been for there to be one central leader who helps hold the church together.

This is the basic core of Catholic teaching on the papacy, but I don't want to leave things with that. I want to show a little bit more about how this works despite the human limitations of the men who are pope.

In Acts 10:1-48 we find out that Peter was the one whom God chose to deliver the message to the church that Gentiles (all non-Jewish people) could become fully integrated into the life of the church.

This means that Peter was the one through whom Jesus fully revealed the truth that the ethnic barriers that had existed between Jews and non-Jews were to be completely broken down.

But in Galatians 2:11-14 we read:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

So Peter was refusing to allow non-Jewish Christians to have the same status as ethnically Jewish Christians. Peter was failing to live up to the teaching that he himself had delivered to the church! So Peter's teaching was absolutely correct, the same as it

was when he was led by God to write two of the letters that now make up the New Testament (1 Peter and 2 Peter), but his actions show his weakness and his sin.

It's been the same way every since within the church. It doesn't mean the Popes aren't sinners. It doesn't mean the Popes act with perfect wisdom in every situation. It doesn't mean the Popes are guaranteed to always be right when it comes to areas that lie outside of their specific authority, like politics and science. Infallibility doesn't mean perfection and sinlessness. What it means is that God protects the church by not allowing the popes to officially teach error when it comes to faith and morals. Some popes have failed to live out their promises of celibacy, but they haven't denied the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Popes have abused their position, using it to for the purpose of becoming personally rich and powerful, but no pope has denied that Christ is truly present in the Eucharist. Papal infallibility has been ensured and protected by God, despite the human weaknesses and failings of the men who have been Pope.