

Gifts of Finest Wheat

Fall 2009 - Ecclesiology

October 29, 2009

Session 5 – The Church is Apostolic

- Prayer –
Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.
V. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.
R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.
Let us pray.
**O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.**

- Questions/Clarifications from last time? From the reading?
- Our goal this evening: Trace the reality of apostolic succession from the NT through the early Church, focusing specifically on the role of the successor of Peter.

- How is the Church Apostolic?
 - In a foundational and historical sense (1 Col 12:28; Eph 2:20; 4:11)
 - In a doctrinal sense – the Church keeps the faith taught by the apostles
 - In a sacramental way – through apostolic succession found in the sacrament of Holy Orders and the role of sanctifying the people
 - In an Eschatological sense (Rev 21:14; Mt 19:28)
- The purpose of the hierarchy (LG 18)
 - “For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God...”
 - “...for the good of the whole body.”
 - “...may arrive at salvation.”
- The teaching in Lumen Gentium – “...having sent forth the apostles as He Himself had been sent by the Father; and He willed that their successors, namely the bishops, should be shepherds in His Church even to the consummation of the world. And in order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed Blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and communion” (LG 18).
- Scriptural witness to Apostolic Succession
 - John 16:12-13 - "I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, **he will guide you to all truth**. He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.

- John 20:21 - “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”
- Luke 10:16 – “Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”
- Acts 1:20 – “May another take his office.”
- 1 Tim 3:15 - But if I should be delayed, you should know how to behave in the household of God, **which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.**
- 1 Tim 4:11, 14 - “Command and teach these things. Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterances **when the elders laid their hands upon you.**”
- 2 Tim 2:2 - And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well.
- Titus 1:5 - “For this reason I left you in Crete so that you might set right what remains to be done and **appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you.**”
- Acts 15
- The Early Church and Apostolic Succession
 - By about 100 AD , each local church was led by a monarchical episcopate and a college of priests
 - Clement, writing contemporaneously with some New Testament authors names three groups: “bishops and deacons¹” and “presbyters.²” Clement considers these offices to be of apostolic origin, and further, quotes scripture as a proof that these offices are not an invention even of the apostles³. It is clear that such leaders in the Church enjoy a position of authority, since Clement recommends submission to them⁴. Nevertheless, the exact relationships between these roles are not clear. It would seem that the Corinthian Church had disposed the bishop⁵, but there is also some suggestion that the revolt was against the presbyters.⁶ It is therefore unclear if both offices were being challenged, or if the two terms were being used univocally.
 - For Ignatius of Antioch, however, the tripartite structure is much more clearly developed. There appears to be a monarchical episcopacy, surrounded by a college of presbyters as well as numerous deacons. The structure is hierarchical, insofar as deacons are subject to the bishop as well as to the presbytery, and presbyters are to yield to the bishop.⁷ Presbyters are to work in harmony with the Bishop like the strings of a lyre.⁸ Ignatius consistently stresses the centrality of

¹ “The Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians commonly known as First Clement.” The Apostolic Fathers. Michael W. Holmes, ed. J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, trans. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1989. 42.4.

² Ibid., 44.5; 47.6; 54.2; 57.1.

³ Ibid., 42.4-5.

⁴ Ibid., 57.1.

⁵ Ibid., 44.1; 44.4.

⁶ Ibid., 44.4; 47.6.

⁷ Ibid., “To the Magnesians.” 2.1; 3.1.

⁸ Ibid., “To the Ephesians.” 4.1.

the role of bishop, and insists that nothing in the Church should be done without his consent.⁹ He even goes so far as to say that without a bishop, presbyters, and deacons, “no group can be called a church.”¹⁰ The exact roles of these offices are only hinted at. He often makes the analogy that the Bishop stands in the place of God, the presbyters in the role of the Apostles, and the deacons in the service of Jesus Christ.¹¹ Furthermore, we are told that deacons serve the “mysteries of Jesus Christ,” and that it falls to the Bishop to be the source of unity at the Eucharist and baptisms, and to oversee marriages.¹² Thus, the trajectory from the New Testament, through Clement, has taken the Church, by an organic growth, to a much more developed idea of the tripartite structure of ministries.

- Irenaeus of Lyon also adds a few notes to this idea of Church structure. He states, in accord with Clement, that the office of bishop was instituted by the apostles, and that the apostles handed on to these men their “place of government.”¹³
- “Bishops by divine institution have succeeded to the place of the apostles” (LG 20).

- **Pope Clement I**

"Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and **they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier.** . . . Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, **they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry**" (*Letter to the Corinthians* 42:4–5, 44:1–3 [A.D. 80]).

- **Irenaeus**

"It is possible, then, for everyone in every church, who may wish to **know the truth**, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which has been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate **those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our own times**, men who neither knew nor taught anything like what these heretics rave about" (*Against Heresies* 3:3:1 [A.D. 189]).

"Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering

⁹ Ibid., “To the Magnesians.” 7.1. “To the Ephesians.” 4.1. “To the Trallians.” 2.2. “To the Smyrnaeans.”

8.1.

¹⁰ Ibid., “To the Trallians.” 3.1.

¹¹ Ibid., “To the Magnesians.” 6.1.

¹² Ibid., “To the Trallians.” 2.3. “To the Smyrnaeans.” 8.1; 8.2 “To Polycarp.” 5.2.

¹³ “Against Heresies.” Irenaeus of Lyon. Found at http://www.piney.com/FathIrenaHerIII.htm#P7317_1944667. Book III, Chapter III. 1.

martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time" (ibid., 3:3:4).

"Since therefore we have such proofs, it is not necessary to seek the truth among others which it is easy to obtain from the Church; since the apostles, like a rich man [depositing his money] in a bank, lodged in her hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth, so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. . . . For how stands the case? Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, **should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant conversation, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question?**" (ibid., 3:4:1).

"[I]t is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church—those who, as I have shown, **possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate, have received the infallible charism of truth,** according to the good pleasure of the Father." (ibid., 4:26:2).

"The true knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient organization of the Church throughout the whole world, and the manifestation of the body of Christ **according to the succession of bishops,** by which succession the bishops have handed down the Church which is found everywhere" (ibid., 4:33:8).

- **Tertullian**

"[The apostles] founded churches in every city, from which all the other churches, one after another, derived the tradition of the faith, and the seeds of doctrine, and are every day deriving them, that they may become churches. Indeed, it is on this account only that they will be able to deem themselves apostolic, as being the offspring of apostolic churches. Therefore the churches, although they are so many and so great, comprise but the one primitive Church, [founded] by the apostles, from which they all [spring]. In this way, all are primitive, and all are apostolic, while they are all proved to be one in unity" (*Demurrer Against the Heretics* 20 [A.D. 200]).

- The Role of Peter in the New Testament

- Peter often speaks for the other apostles (Mt 19:27; Mk 8:29; Lk 12:41)
- The apostles are sometimes referred to as "Peter and his companions." (Lk 9:32; Mk 16:7; Acts 2:37)
- Peter's name always leads the lists of apostles; Judas Iscariot always takes up the rear
- Peter's name is mentioned 191 times in the NT, more than all the rest of the apostles put together
- Matthew 16:17-19 - 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."

- Is 22:16-23 – “Thus says the Lord, the GOD of hosts: Up, go to that official, Shebna, master of the palace...The LORD shall hurl you down headlong, mortal man...! I will thrust you from your office and pull you down from your station. On that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe, and gird him with your sash, and give over to him your authority. 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.** I will fix him like a peg in a sure spot, to be a place of honor for his family.”
- Luke 22:31-32 - "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; **and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers."**
- John 21:15-17 - 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.**
- The Bishop of Rome in the Early Church
 - **Pope Clement I**

"Owing to the sudden and repeated calamities and misfortunes which have befallen us, we must acknowledge that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the matters in dispute among you, beloved; and especially that abominable and unholy sedition, alien and foreign to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-willed persons have inflamed to such madness that your venerable and illustrious name, worthy to be loved by all men, has been greatly defamed. . . . Accept our counsel and you will have nothing to regret. . . . **If anyone disobey the things which have been said by him [God] through us [i.e., that you must reinstate your leaders], let them know that they will involve themselves in transgression and in no small danger. . . . You will afford us joy and gladness if being obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit, you will root out the wicked passion of jealousy"** (*Letter to the Corinthians* 1, 58–59, 63 [A.D. 80]).
 - **Ignatius of Antioch**

"Ignatius . . . to **the church also which holds the presidency**, in the location of the country of the Romans, worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of blessing, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and, because you **hold the presidency in love**, named after Christ and named after the Father"

(*Letter to the Romans* 1:1 [A.D. 110]).

"You [the church at Rome] have envied no one, but others you have taught. I desire only that what you have enjoined in your instructions may remain in force" (ibid., 3:1).

- **Irenaeus**

"But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of **the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome** by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. **With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree**, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition" (*Against Heresies* 3:3:2 [A.D. 189]).

- **Cyprian of Carthage**

"The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven' [Matt. 16:18–19]. ... On him [Peter] he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep [John 21:17], and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, **yet he founded a single chair [cathedra]**, and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were also what Peter was [i.e., apostles], but **a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair**. So too, all [the apostles] are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the apostles in single-minded accord. **If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?**" (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; 1st edition [A.D. 251]).

- **Jerome**

"I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but your blessedness [Pope Damasus I], that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside this house is profane. Anyone who is not in the ark of Noah will perish when the flood prevails" (*Letters* 15:2 [A.D. 396]).

- **Hierarchical Communion and Collegiality**

- "But Episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and of governing, which, however, of its very nature, can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college" (LG 21).

- “Indeed, the very ancient practice whereby bishops duly established in all parts of the world were in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome in a bond of unity, charity and peace, and also the councils assembled together, in which more profound issues were settled in common, the opinion of the many having been prudently considered, both of these factors are already an indication of the collegiate character and aspect of the Episcopal order; and the ecumenical councils held in the course of centuries are also manifest proof of that same character” (LG 22).
- “But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head” (LG 22).
- “The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful. The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches” (LG 23).
- “The individual bishops, who are placed in charge of particular churches, exercise their pastoral government over the portion of the People of God committed to their care, and not over other churches nor over the universal Church. But each of them, as a member of the episcopal college and legitimate successor of the apostles, is obliged by Christ's institution and command to be solicitous for the whole Church...by governing well their own church as a portion of the universal Church, they themselves are effectively contributing to the welfare of the whole Mystical Body, which is also the body of the churches... With all their energy, therefore, they must supply to the missions both workers for the harvest and also spiritual and material aid...And finally, the bishops, in a universal fellowship of charity, should gladly extend their fraternal aid to other churches, especially to neighboring and more needy dioceses in accordance with the venerable example of antiquity.
- Conclusions
 - Scripture attests to the unique role of the apostles as being sent with the authority of Christ to continue his mission and teachings.
 - Scripture also gives a glimpse at the first generation of post-apostolic leaders, appointed through the laying on of hands.
 - Within a few decades, these successors were known as Bishops.
 - By the end of the first generation after the apostles, a system of one bishop surrounded by a college of priests and deacons functioned in each local church
 - Local churches were not wholly independent, but had a communion or fellowship of charity
 - Peter, among the apostles, had a place of primacy
 - This primacy was that of a permanent office passed on to the bishop of Rome.
 - The earliest records show a nascent primacy of the Bishop of Rome among the local Churches, who turned to that see to settle disputes.

- This apostolic succession, particularly in the Church of Rome, was seen in the early Church as the source and test of orthodox belief and practice

- Questions?
- Announcements
 - Next time – The teaching office of the Magisterium (Infallibility, Ecumenical Councils, The Ordinary Universal Magisterium, the ordinary Magisterium)
 - Reading for next time

- Closing prayer –

**Heavenly Father,
in these trying times
when the spirit of the age
threatens Christian values,
give our bishop and our bishop-elect holiness of life
and wisdom to direct and guide our diocesan
family so that we may grow in your love.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.**

Amen.