

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Chair of St Peter
February 24, 2019

+

Today we observe the Feast of the Chair of St Peter. This is the Feast of Title of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St Peter. That makes it a happy occasion, and in honor of which we will say the *Te Deum* at the end of Mass. During the liturgical year our congregation celebrates two other occasions as feasts of title: Saint Athanasius and Saint Gregory the Great. The common link between all these is *teaching*. St Athanasius and St Gregory are honored as Doctors of the Church. The Chair of St Peter puts the emphasis not on St Peter but on the Chair. The chair is the teaching seat.

If a professor in a university holds a chair this does not mean he is lifting up a piece of furniture! And a church building, large or small, is called a cathedral because the bishop's teaching seat (cathedra) is located there. A cathedral city is called a see city (s-e-e- not s-e-a) because it is the location of the teaching seat of the bishop. And the Vatican is the Holy See because it is the location of the teaching seat of the Pope.

The common link between the Chair of St Peter, St Athanasius and St Gregory is no coincidence. As converts to Catholicism many of us have found the only way to preserve what is good and holy from our Christian backgrounds is to place it under the protection and patronage of the Holy See. Having said all that reminds me of the quip Fr Stravinskis gave us of an evangelical protestant minister who pointed to today's feast as proof Catholics are pagans: they even worship furniture!

It is much easier for a preacher to give a sermon about St Peter or St Athanasius or St Gregory than about an inanimate object. But the Church's commemoration of this feast day goes back at least to the 4th Century. We honor the apparatus we call the *Magisterium*, the office of Peter, in its role as teacher of the faith. This Magisterium is not competitive of theological endeavors but complementary. The theologian attempts to put talk about God into a satisfactory pattern. The Magisterium has care of the overall proportions of revealed truth. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (¶890) says "It is the Magisterium's task to preserve God's people from deviations and defections and to guarantee them the objective possibility of professing the true faith without error."

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Chair of St Peter
February 24, 2019

+

When Our Lord Jesus asked Simon the fisherman “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered right. “You are the Messiah.” What was involved was not a game show like “Go to the Head of the Class.” Salvation and eternal life are the prize: living the life intended by God when He created you and me. Many people do not give the right answer. They try to disarm the crucial importance of the right answer with professions of sincerity. You remember the story of the gentlemen who got up every night, padded to his bathroom without turning on the lights, opened a bottle of cough syrup and took a swallow. One day the man’s cleaning lady reorganized the bottles on the cabinet shelf. That night as usual the man got up to take his cough syrup. Only this time it was cleaning fluid. And they found him dead on the bathroom rug the next morning. The man sincerely thought he was taking cough syrup and doing the right thing. But he was dead wrong.

Sincerity is not enough. We can be sincerely wrong. And what if we are wrong about Christ and His Church? You and I know it is difficult enough to inherit eternal life when we are right about Christ and try to conform our lives to the gospel. Twice in the gospels Our Lord declares “many are called; few are chosen.”

The dictates of sincerity would have us believe truth is subjective. How often we hear it said “You have your truth and I have mine.” Christ however says, “I am Truth.” Cough syrup is not strychnine, no matter what we believe. Not to believe Christ does not change the fact of the matter about Him. He is the Truth and the Way that leads to eternal life. And He tells us “Without Me you are nothing.”

So Peter had it right. And the Lord Jesus conferred on him the name Peter. That means *rock*. The rock was not Peter but Christ Himself, the only foundation upon which everything in the Christian faith is built. But two other important things were part of this exchange. The Lord accepted what Peter said as not just mere human reasoning but as divinely inspired. It is *the Father* Who has revealed this truth to Peter. It is the Father Who singled out Simon Peter as the natural foundation for His Son’s society. And as a result of this the name Peter was conferred. Peter is not a nickname as much as a *mandate*. You remember that in the Old Testament a change of name usually preceded a mission. It was no longer Abram but Abraham. “For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.”

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Feast of the Chair of St Peter
February 24, 2019

+

(*Genesis 17:5*) The new relationship involved receiving a new name. And the Lord declared: “Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel.” (*Genesis 32:28*) The new name signified a new self, a new relationship to the Lord and to the people. And it happened once again at Caesarea Philippi on the day Simon Peter gave the right answer and received a new relationship to the Lord and His people. That makes the Chair of St Peter much more than a piece of furniture. It is a constitutive element of Christ’s Church, without which we would not *have* Christ’s Church. The Holy See is the custodian of communion with Christ and the guide to souls of the guarantee of access to the love of the Lord.