

The Church, A Sign of Unity

(Following is a translation of an address by Pope Paul VI in Italian to pilgrims from Italy, France, England, the United States, Germany and Mexico on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Council of Trent, and as a sign of unity and charity.)

Think with us for a moment. The great question which the Council has posed to the world is: "How can we be united in our full and perfect sign-ificance as one, holy, Catholic and apostolic, and has also posed to the world for its consideration, is that of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

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Pope Paul greets a crippled child at an audience in St. Peter's at the Vatican.

Church's Voice Aids Faith Quest

(Following is a translation of the talk given Jan. 11 by Pope VI at a general audience.)

You who come to visit the Pope with filial devotion and an open spirit, certainly feel a quantity of questions, of curiosities, of remembrances of every kind, historical, artistic and literary, which are the most important question that is here re-awakened, you find that it is the question of faith. If you listen to the voice that rises from your consciences you hear echoing the very voice of Jesus questioning Martha of the Gospel: "Dost thou believe this?" (John 11, 26).

There comes to our memory the episode of the meeting of Dante with St. Peter, in the 24th canto of the Divine Comedy, when the Apostle asks the "pope" (Dante) if he believes in Christ: "what is faith?" (V, 52-53).

Indeed, faith is subjected here to a kind of interrogation regarding its adherence to what is here proclaimed: behold the successor of St. Peter; do I believe it? Behold the voice of the Lord, which the Apostle repeats, explains, applies and defends. Behold the magisterium of the Church, which in its supreme authoritative See and its functions — that of teaching not only science, but the word of God, and teaching it in the name of Christ of interpreting it and safeguarding it in its true significance and, if required, in an inflexible way, in certain special cases and certain solemn forms.

It is important to explore the spiritual impression stirred in the Pope's visitor in this respect. The most usual spiritual reaction would be that of the Catholic faithful toward the magisterium of the Church, that is to say, a consoling trust.

The faithful Catholic knows the authority to teach that which He Himself had taught, that He entrusted them with the task of being the transmitters of His Word, he knows that this Word is linked with the plan of salvation and that to heed this Word, that is to say faith,

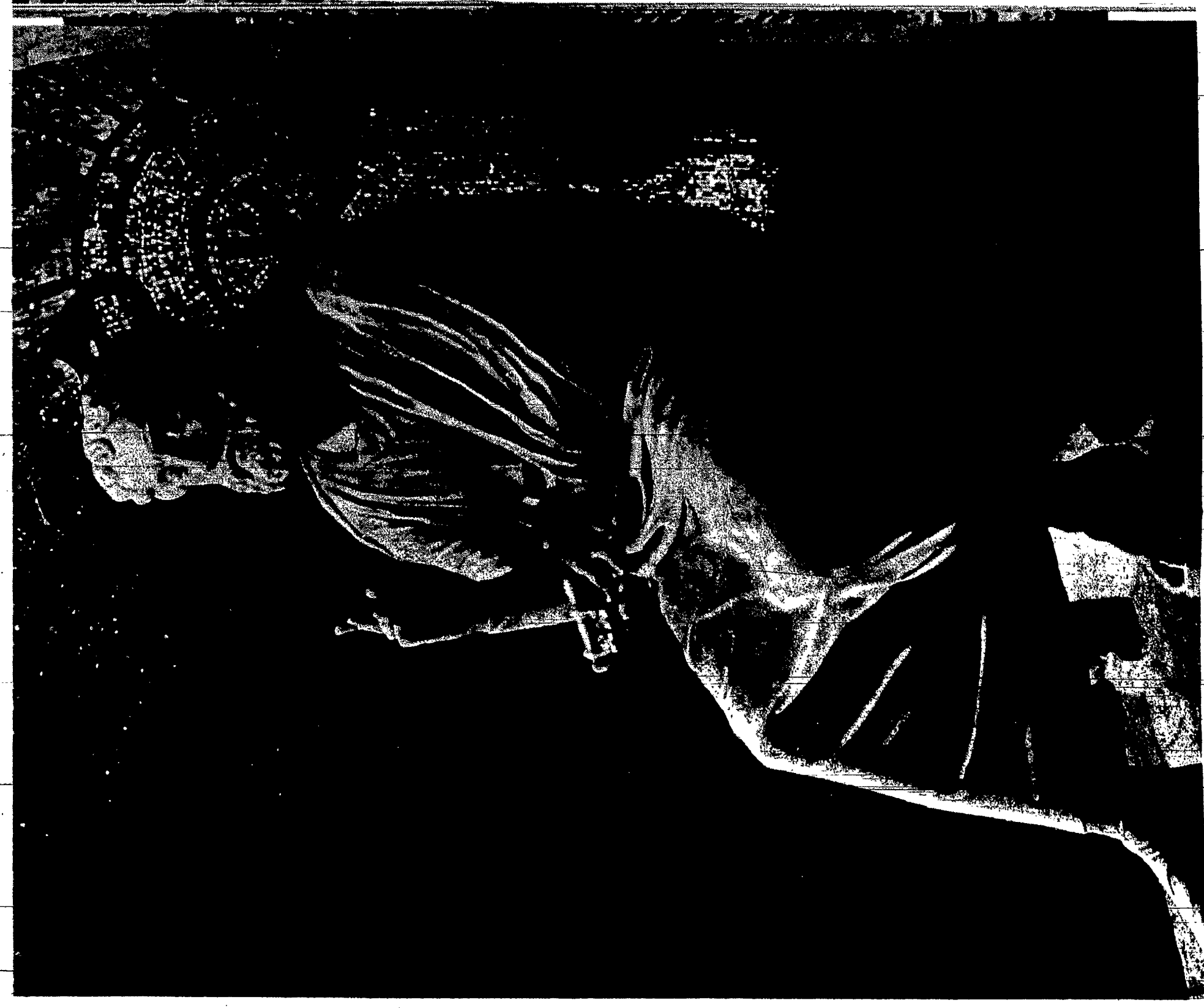
is the fundamental condition for being admitted to the gifts of life which God, the Father, bestows on the Church. This mission takes place through a magisterium and efficacious assistance of the Holy Spirit, He who teaches the Apostles and the Church "all truth" (John 16, 13) relative to our supernatural religious will. And he knows that this transmission of the divine message is a guarantee of the univocal and stable meaning of the divine message called tradition.

That is to say he knows that he has received the ministerial and wonderful testimony of divine Goodness which will be revealed to be received, safeguarded and spread in mankind by means of this human and hierarchic structure.

To those who have experienced spiritual trials of any kind in order to attain (or before attaining) the objective certainty of faith, meeting with the Church's magisterium gives indeed a sense of gratitude toward Christ, for having opened the way to an unshakable and living oraganism, to an organism which is qualified to serve, that is to say to an authoritative voice which in reality does not reveal new truths, nor is it superior to Sacred Scripture (although this has strong reasons, proper to the divine Word, but which is the embryonic and faithful echo and the secure interpreter of the divine Word.

We wish this spiritual experience to be the principal source of the ecclasiastic magistry, is it so for everyone? Unfortunately not. A few who are actually within the Church today, severed from the values of the faith, with reservations and diffidence toward the Church, would like to recognize in this magisterium more than anything else the task of confirming the "infalible faithful." Others — followers of doctrines which deny the Church's magisterium — would recognize in each of the faithful the capacity for interpreting Sacred Scripture freely, according to their own intuition, which is an all too easily assigned claim of inspiration.

A Year for Faith Study



Ancient statue of St. Peter stands in vast basilica built in his honor at the Vatican.

Jesus said, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' And concerning St. Paul, Jesus said, 'This man is a chosen vessel to me, to carry my name among nations and kings and the children of Israel and I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'

(Following is a translation of Pope Paul's statement issued Feb. 22 for the 18th centenary of the martyrdom of St. Peter and Paul.)

The Apostles Peter and Paul are rightly considered by the faithful to be the principal pillars of this holy Roman See and also of the whole universal Church of the living God. Accordingly we feel it part of our duty to address this exhortation to you, calling on you to meet in your own territories the devout celebration of the courageous martyrdom in Rome 19 centuries ago of these two Apostles: Peter, chosen by Christ to be the foundation of His Church and the Bishop of this mother City; and Paul, the chosen of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13, 27), teacher and friend of the Gentiles, who, by his martyrdom, established in Rome.

The date of this memorable event cannot be fixed with certainty on the basis of historical documents. The traditional date of the martyrdom of St. Peter in Rome during the persecution of Nero, which ranged from the year 64 to 68. The martyrdom is recalled by St. Clement, successor of Peter in the government of the Roman Church, in his letter to the Corinthians, to whom he proposes the "heroes" of the great Church who through jealousy and envy, were persecuted and endured to the death" (1 Epist. to Clementis ad Corinthios, V, 1-2; cf. Funk, I, p. 105).

The two Apostles Peter and Paul were joined by a "great multitude" (Tacitus, Annales, XV, 44), first fruits of the martyrs of the Roman Church, as Clement also writes: "To these men who lived such holy lives, were added a great number of others and tortures because of jealousy and became a shining example among us" (1 Epist. to Clementis, VI, 1, p. 107).

Leaving it to the experts to discuss the exact date of the martyrdom of the two Apostles, we have chosen the centenary of the death of St. Peter in Rome in so doing we are following the example of our venerated predecessor Plus IX, who wished the solemn commemoration of St. Peter's martyrdom to be held in the year 1867.

And since the first Christian community of Rome gave joint honor to the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul, and the Church subsequently celebrated the anniversary of both Apostles with a single liturgical feast on June 29, we have decided to join together in this centenary the two dates of the martyrdom of the Princes of the Apostles.

Moreover, we feel a certain obligation to commemorate this anniversary because of the capacity, now universal, of the people, and which, have left their imprint on the course of time, and which, viewed from the distance of past years and given memories, offer to the person who reflects on the value of his lessons on the value of his life. It were a fitting thing if, in these days, the faithful could grasp more clearly today than at the time the events took place, when they were not at ways or entirely understood.

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