

Our Catholic Heritage

Establishment of the Church

Through Baptism, the Church Is Founded

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS

"If this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail. But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God." (Acts 5, 38-39)

These words were spoken in the year 30 A.D. by the Rabbi Gamaliel at the trial of Peter and John. They bear witness to the presence of the Church on the stage of history. They bear witness to a power in the world, but not of the world. Mystery had entered history for all time to come.

Jesus preached the Kingdom of God, and the Church was born. So runs the old anti-church cliché. Yet many a truth is spoken in jest. One cannot deny the fact that Jesus founded a Church. The Apostles knew this and bore witness to it. Gamaliel sensed it and did it homage.

The poor of God rejoiced in it. The martyrs would soon die for it.

"The Divine Redeemer began to build the Mystical Body of His Church when He was preaching and giving His commandments. He completed it when He hung in glory on the cross. He manifested and promulgated it in the visible sending of the Holy Spirit upon His disciples." (Pius XII, Mystici Corporis)

Jesus spoke of his flock, and then placed His sheep in the hands of Peter. Jesus spoke of the vineyard of God, and appointed the Twelve as laborers for the harvest. The early Christians saw themselves as the living Temple of God, and often quoted Psalm 118:

"The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

It cannot be denied that Jesus bestowed the promise and the reality of power on His chosen Twelve:

"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18, 18)

In the harrowing moment on Calvary when blood and water poured from the side of Jesus, the Fathers of the Faith saw the completion of the Church:

"Through Baptism, I say, and through the mysteries flowing from the side of Christ, the Church is founded. From His side Christ built up the Church just as Eve came forth from the side of Adam. . . As God made woman from the side of Adam, so Christ from His own side gave us the water and

blood whence the Church is renewed." (St. John Chrysostom, The Catechism)

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit descended in fire on the Twelve. The Good News was heard in all the tongues of men.

"There were added that day 3,000 souls. And they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers." (Acts 2, 41-42)

Jesus left a doctrine, a mission, and a structure. He endowed them with power. Barely 20 years after Pentecost, at the Council of Jerusalem, Peter, Paul, James and the elders could say with serene assurance:

"The Holy Spirit and WE have decided. . ." (Acts 15, 28)

St. Peter — Foundation of the Church

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS

"Peter, the leader of the choir, the mouth of the apostles, the head of that tribe, the ruler of the whole world, the foundation of the Church, the ardent lover of Christ." (St. John Chrysostom)

God writes straight with crooked lines. Such as the case of Simon, son of John. The fisherman of Galilee was to become the fisher of men from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The straying sheep who wept at the cockcrow was to become the shepherd of the flock. He who sank beneath the waves on Tiberias was to become the rock of the Church.

All the Gospels tell us that it was Peter who made the first act of faith in Jesus:

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Matt. 16, 10)

Christ in turn gave Peter the promise of authority and power:

"You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church." (Matt. 16, 18)

Luke records Jesus' prediction of Peter's betrayal together with the undying promise:

"... I have prayed for you (Simon) that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Lk. 22, 32)

In the last chapter of St. John, the Good Shepherd gives Peter the care of the flock:

"Feed my lambs. . . Tend my sheep . . . Feed my sheep."

Strengthened by the power of Christ, the first Pope went out to sow the seed. He stood on the



ST. PETER

housetop on Pentecost, and preached the first sermon (Acts 2). Silver and gold he had none, but what he had he gave — the healing power of Christ (Acts 3).

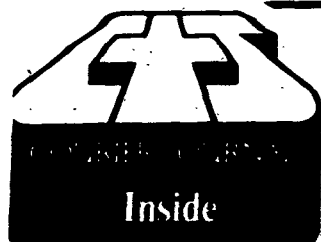
"They even carried the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall upon them." (Acts 5, 15)

Peter saw the second Pentecost, that of the Gentiles, in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). To Peter was given the revelation that opened the Church to all the nations at the Council of Jerusalem. In his first letter he gives us the classic definition of the Church:

"You are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people set apart . . . God's own people." (I Pet. 2, 9-10)

His travels brought him at length to Rome where he died in the persecution of Nero (C. 65 A.D.). The testament of Peter to a troubled century like ours is found in his second letter. It is the voice that still speaks from the Vatican hill:

"We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty . . . We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this, as to a lamp shining in the darkness until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." (II Pet. 1, 16-19)



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