



# Catholic Courier

Fall Marriage Supplement after page 10.

DIocese OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 105 NO. 49 ■ THURSDAY, September 15, 1994 ■ 75¢ ■ 24 PAGES/2 sectio.



POPE PIUS IX

## Strict rules guide church in judging statements' weight

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Senior staff writer

Once while talking to a group of seminarians, Pope John XXIII exclaimed; "I am not infallible. The pope is only infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*. I will never speak *ex cathedra*, therefore I am not infallible."

Pope John XXIII was correct in stating that he would not speak infallibly unless he was to speak *ex cathedra* - that is, from Peter's throne and with the full teaching authority invested in Peter's successor.

But Pope John *could* have spoken infallibly under very specific circumstances and by fulfilling certain clearly defined conditions.

Only two popes have been so moved to speak infallibly: Pope Pius IX in 1854, when he enunciated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary; and Pope Pius XII in 1950, when he defined the doctrine of Mary's Assumption.

Although these are the only two instances of papal infallibility, the word "infallibility" has been bandied about in terms of other papal pronouncements over the years.

*'The pope must make it manifestly clear that he is defining dogma.'*

Father Joseph Hart

Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical "Humanae Vitae" produced debate over whether his statement concerning birth control was an infallible teaching. More recently, Pope John Paul II's May 30 statement concerning the church's position on the ordination of women - and, in particular, his use of the word "definitively" - has led to speculation about whether his pronouncement fulfills the criteria of infallible teachings.

Putting aside examination of the teachings contained in these statements, subsequent discussions have raised questions about what exactly papal infallibility is and what is necessary for a statement to be deemed an infallible teaching. Indeed, in some people's minds, almost any papal pronouncement is commonly - and mistakenly - thought to be "infallible."

Church law is very clear, however, that all papal pronouncements are not infallible.

According to Canon 749 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law: "The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful, whose

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# papal infallibility

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