

Peter in Babylon

1 Peter 5:1-14; John 21:18-19; Revelation 17

WHAT WE FOUND

The case assembled itself: "She who is at Babylon... sends you greetings" (1 Peter 5:13), and Revelation's own codebook identifies Babylon as the city on seven mountains with dominion over the kings of the earth (Revelation 17:9, 18): Rome. John recorded the beach prophecy, stretched-out hands, girded by another, for readers who already knew how it was fulfilled (John 21:18-19). The early witnesses are unanimous and early: Clement writing from Rome within living memory, Ignatius ("I do not command you as Peter and Paul did"), Dionysius, Irenaeus, and Gaius offering to point out the apostle's "trophy" on the Vatican hill. And the silence thunders: no other city in the ancient world ever claimed Peter's tomb; no rival tradition ever arose.

Under the high altar, excavation found what the tradition said: a first-century venerated grave beneath the second-century trophy, with remains Pope St. Paul VI announced as identified "in a way that we can consider convincing," the Church's own careful words, and ours. Rome's primacy is Peter's primacy with an address: the keys stayed where the keybearer fell, and the see was, in Vatican I's own words, "founded and consecrated" with his blood. "Presiding in charity," St. Ignatius called that church (CCC 834).

And the letter from Babylon showed the commission completed: the shepherd still tending ("tend the flock of God... willingly"), refusing titles ("fellow elder"), and blessing with the very verb of Luke 22:32: the God of all grace "will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Peter 5:10). Turned again long ago, strengthening to the last line. One session remains: what exactly travels down the blood-bought line, and what is it all for.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Romans, 4*

On the road to his own martyrdom about AD 107, Ignatius begs the Roman church not to interfere with his coming death, and drops the sentence historians treasure: I do not command you as Peter and Paul did; they were apostles, I am a convict. Writing to Rome alone does Ignatius speak this way, assuming as common knowledge that Peter and Paul had taught and commanded in that church.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book III, 1*

Irenaeus states the founding as settled fact: while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome and laying the foundations of the church, Matthew issued his Gospel, and after their departure Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, handed down Peter's preaching in writing. For Irenaeus, Rome's apostolic foundation by the two chief apostles is the fixed point from which his whole succession argument runs.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Jerome *On Illustrious Men, 1*

Jerome opens his catalogue of Christian writers with Peter: prince of the apostles, who governed the church at Rome until the last year of Nero, when he was crucified, and, the tradition Jerome records, fastened head-downward at his own request, declaring himself unworthy to be crucified as his Lord was. The steward's final act, in the Church's memory, was one more deferral to the King.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Read all of 1 Peter this week, one sitting if you can, hearing it as a late letter of the man this study has followed: from Babylon, near the end, still feeding sheep.

2.

Take a virtual walk through the Vatican necropolis this week (the Scavi; the Vatican posts a tour online) and pray at the trophy of Gaius from your chair: a first-century grave, still gathering the nations.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord, you led Peter where he did not wish to go; give his successor a martyr's freedom, and your whole Church a martyr's love."

MEMORY VERSE

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you." (1 Peter 5:10, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Final assignment: reread the four pillars in one sitting, **Matthew 16:13-20**, **Luke 22:24-34**, **John 21:15-19**, **Acts 15:6-12**, and write down your single strongest remaining objection to the papacy, whatever it is. The last session exists for it. Bring it.

Catechism Connection: CCC 834; 882; 936