

Servant of the Servants

Matthew 16:17-19; Luke 22:26-32; John 13:12-15; John 21:15-17

WHAT WE FOUND

The four pillars read as one act in four scenes: Caesarea Philippi the constitution (revealed confession, rock, keys), the Last Supper the guarantee and the style (a prayed-for faith, and greatness redefined by service), the beach the care (love as the one question Christ asks, over a flock that stays Christ's), Jerusalem the operation (the steward's decisive voice within the council of apostles and elders, Acts 15:7-11, sealed by the Spirit). One office, whole, discovered by this group text by text.

Infallibility, defined exactly: when the pope, as shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine of faith or morals, he is preserved from error (CCC 891), the mature form of the Father's revealed confession (Matthew 16:17) and Christ's prayed-for faith (Luke 22:32). The longer list is the notes: not impeccability, not inspiration, not wisdom, not every papal word, not a power over the deposit but total servitude to it (CCC 86), exercised solemnly about twice in two centuries. And 1870's honest history, contested minority and all, passes the acorn-and-oak test: the definition fenced the office; it did not invent it. The fence has held.

The style is fixed forever by the towel (John 13:14-15) and Gregory's signature, *servus servorum Dei*, servant of the servants of God. The keys and the towel were handed to the same man by the same Lord, and every authentic renewal of the office has been the towel reclaiming the keys. And the study's last word was its first assignment turned outward: strengthened, now strengthen (Luke 22:32). You wrote a name and a date. Feed his sheep.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Leo the Great *Sermon 3, On His Birthday as Pope*

Leo preaches the line that carried the Church through her worst holders: the dignity of Peter is not lacking even in an unworthy heir. The strength Christ gave the rock, Leo insists, remains Christ's gift and Christ's work; Peter's solidity persists in Peter's see because the Lord who conferred it does not withdraw it, and the merit of the office was never the merit of the man.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great *Letters (Register V.18; VII.33)*

When the patriarch of Constantinople styled himself ecumenical patriarch, Gregory answered not by grabbing a grander title but by adopting the humblest one in history: servant of the servants of God. Whoever calls himself universal priest, he wrote to the emperor, is in his elation the forerunner of Antichrist; and he governed the universal Church while calling universal titles poison. Servant of the servants of God became an enduring papal title: Gregory's towel, still signed today.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Paul II *Ut Unum Sint* 88-96

Writing to a divided Christendom, John Paul described the papacy as the ministry of unity whose mission is born from the mercy Christ showed to Peter, a primacy of service, and then, in a gesture without precedent in papal teaching (*Ut Unum Sint* 95-96), he asked leaders of other Christian communities to help him find ways of exercising the office so that its service could be recognized by all. The keeper of the keys, asking the separated brethren to help him carry them: the office's style, in the office's own voice.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Execute your Send commitment this week: the named person, the concrete act, the date. Report back to one group member; strengthening is a team sport.

2.

Make the study's habit permanent: the daily Our Father for the pope, for life. This week's addition, the last: "Lord, keep your steward's hands on the keys and his knees at the basin, and make me a strengthener of my brethren."

3.

Consider leading: this guide, this format, these questions are now yours. Pray this week about gathering your own table of twelve, and tell your leader what you hear.

MEMORY VERSE

"...let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.... I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22:26-27, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

There is no next session; there is a next table. Reread your Send commitment today, tell one person, and put the date on your calendar. And keep the habit that outlasts the study: one Our Father, daily, for the servant of the servants of God.

Catechism Connection: CCC 86; 882; 890-891