

Take-Home

Peter and the Keys

Unless Someone Guides Me

Module One

What We Found

Peter is named first in every apostolic list and explicitly called first in Matthew 10. He speaks for the group, preaches first at Pentecost, and receives the vision that opens the Church to the Gentiles. Three scenes single him out completely: the keys at Caesarea Philippi, the prayer at the Last Supper, and the threefold charge beside the sea.

In Luke 22 the grammar does the work. Satan asks to sift all of them; Christ says he has prayed for you, singular; and then tells him to strengthen his brothers.

And we learned the four conditions under which the Church holds that a pope teaches infallibly, and everything those conditions leave out: opinions, interviews, conduct, politics, prudential judgments. Note the distinction carefully: what those conditions leave out is the guarantee of irreformability, not every claim on our assent (CCC 892). The claim has always been far narrower than its critics assume.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Jerome

Letter 15, to Pope Damasus, around 376 (summary)

The great critical scholar of his age, writing from the East during a contested succession, asks Rome with whom he should be in communion and says he is joined to the chair of Peter.

Voice of the Church

The Fathers of Chalcedon

At the reading of Leo's Tome, 451

The bishops examined the Roman letter against the faith, and then acclaimed it, the acclamation including the cry that Peter had spoken through Leo.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Against the Donatists he appealed to the unbroken order of bishops at Rome as a publicly checkable fact. The argument only works because everyone already knew the list.

Ready Response

“There were terrible popes.” Agree, and name one if you know one. There is nothing here you have to defend, and he is probably expecting you to flinch. Then say the part almost nobody in these arguments has actually read, and you have. CCC 891 sets out four conditions under which a pope teaches infallibly, and the guarantee is about the preservation of teaching, not the holiness of the man. Outside those four, his ordinary teaching still asks for religious submission of mind and will (CCC 892); it simply is not thereby irreformable. His opinions, his interviews, his conduct and his politics are not covered at all. The claim is narrower than the one your friend is attacking, and you can show him where it is written down.

“Paul rebuked Peter.” This one does not have to rattle you, because our Lord was not surprised by it. In Luke 22 you watched the grammar do the work: Satan asks to sift all of them, Christ says he has prayed for you, singular, and then tells that same man to strengthen his brothers, on the night he knew the man would deny him. Then John 21, three questions for three denials, and the flock handed over anyway. Say that. A rebuke from Paul fits that pattern rather than breaking it, because the promise was never a statement about how reliable Peter was.

“The early Church knew nothing of this.” This is where you will be tempted to bluff. Do not. If you do not know the second and third centuries well, say so, and say you will go and read. What you can say is what you read for yourself: four passages, a quarter of an hour, and Peter named first and called first, prayed for by name, asked three times and given the flock, preaching first at Pentecost, and handed the vision that opened the door to the Gentiles. That is in the New Testament, not in a later argument about it. Ask your friend to read the same four and tell you what he sees.

Live It This Week

- Memorize the four conditions in CCC 891.
- Read Luke 22:31-34 and John 21:15-19 together, in that order.
- Pray for the Pope by name daily this week.

Memory Verse

“*But I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.*” **Luke 22:32**

In the Catechism

CCC 552-553, 880-887, 891, 892. Learn 891 by heart.