

The Pope

1. What does the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) believe and teach about the Pope?

- 1) Jesus gave Peter first place among the twelve apostles because of his confession of faith (Matt 16:16–18)¹ so that the Church would be united.²
- 2) Jesus said that the Church would be built upon Peter, “the unshakeable rock of the Church,” (Matt 16:19) whose mission is “to keep this faith from every lapse.”³
 - This “primacy of jurisdiction over the whole Church of God” was “immediately and directly promised” to Peter.⁴
- 3) Jesus entrusted the authority of the keys of the kingdom to Peter (Matt 16:19), which refers to the “authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church.”⁵
 - “Binding and loosing” (Matt 16:19) involves absolving sin, pronouncing doctrinal judgments, and making disciplinary decisions in the Church.⁶
 - This authority was entrusted only to Peter, Jesus confirming this after his resurrection (“feed my sheep,” John 21:15).⁷
- 4) The apostles’ office has a permanent, continuing aspect “until the end of time,” because the gospel is the source of life and Jesus promised to always be with the Church.⁸
- 5) The apostles designated men to continue their ministry after their deaths, and ordained that after their successors’ deaths others should then take over “without interruption.”⁹
 - The apostles received the ministry of reconciliation from Christ (2 Cor 5:18), which is part of the power of the keys of the kingdom.¹⁰
- 6) The Pope is Peter’s successor and thus receives the same primacy Peter had as head of the bishops (the apostles’ successors) and the Church.¹¹

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 552, 881.

² First Vatican Council, “First dogmatic constitution on the Church of Christ,” section 4; “Chapter 3: On the power and character of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff,” section 3.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 552, 881.

⁴ First Vatican Council, “Chapter 1: On the institution of the apostolic primacy in blessed Peter,” section 1.

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 553.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 553, 981.

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 553.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 860; First Vatican Council, “Chapter 2: On the permanence of the primacy of blessed Peter in the Roman pontiffs,” section 1. Second Vatican Council, “Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church,” section 2.

⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sections 861–62. First Vatican Council, “Chapter 2: On the permanence of the primacy of blessed Peter in the Roman pontiffs,” section 3.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 981.

¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 880;

- 7) Jesus governs the Church “through Peter and the other apostles, who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops.”¹² Thus the Pope is called the “vicar of Christ”—Christ’s earthly representative.
- 8) The continued teaching ministry of the Pope and bishops (the apostles’ appointed successors) establishes the Church as apostolic.¹³
- 9) The Pope is the Bishop of Rome, Peter’s successor, the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ, the pastor of the entire Church, having “full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered.”¹⁴
 - The Pope as Peter’s successor is the visible foundation of Christ’s church.¹⁵
- 10) The Pope speaks infallibly when he “proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals.”¹⁶
 - This refers to when the Pope “speaks EX CATHEDRA, that is, when...he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church.”¹⁷
 - This infallibility is necessary so that the purity of the faith will be preserved in the Church and is conferred by Christ.¹⁸
 - This is in accord with Jesus’ promise to Peter, that his faith would not fail and he would strengthen the brethren (Luke 22:32).¹⁹
 - God confers this “gift of truth and never-failing faith” on the Pope for the salvation of the lost, the protection of the Church from error, and the nourishing of the flock. Schism is thus prevented and unity preserved.²⁰
- 11) Every Catholic must believe this doctrine.²¹
 - This “must be believed by all faithful Christians...no one can depart from it without endangering his faith and salvation...if anyone [disagrees] let him be anathema.”²²

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 869.

¹³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 857.

¹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 882. First Vatican Council, “Chapter 3: On the power and character of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff,” section 2. Second Vatican Council, “Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in The Church,” section 2.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 936.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 891.

¹⁷ First Vatican Council, “Chapter 4: On the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff,” section 9.

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 889.

¹⁹ First Vatican Council, “Chapter 4: On the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff,” section 6.

²⁰ First Vatican Council, “Chapter 4: On the infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff,” section 7.

²¹ First Vatican Council, “First dogmatic constitution on the Church of Christ,” section 7.

²² First Vatican Council, “Chapter 3: On the power and character of the primacy of the Roman Pontiff,” sections 1, 4, 9.

2. Roman Catholic Belief about the Pope in Light of Scripture

- 1) Peter was never made the head of the apostles; Jesus is their head (John 13:13).
- 2) As one needed to see the risen Christ to be an apostle, there were no successors to the apostles (Acts 1:21–22).
- 3) A hierarchical government over the entire church by Pope and bishops has no NT basis. Christ is the head of the body (Col 1:18).
- 4) The true church is apostolic not because of a continuing succession of religious leaders, but by adherence to NT faith and practice. Apostasy occurs when the apostolic faith is rejected (Gal 1:8–9), not by rejection of ecclesiastical polity.
- 5) The Pope is not infallible; only God is infallible (Num 23:19).
- 6) “This rock” in Matthew 16:18 is best interpreted as referring either to Jesus, Peter’s confession, or to Peter as representative of the apostles (cf. Eph 2:20). It does not teach Petrine authority.
 - Nowhere does the NT say that Peter was given the exclusive authority the RCC claims.
- 7) The “keys of the kingdom” in Matt 16:19 do not refer to the forgiveness of sins and etc. No one can forgive sins except God.
 - The best, most consistently literal interpretation of Matt 16:19 sees the church as exercising authority (“keys”) in the kingdom of God/heaven when Christ returns and establishes the kingdom on the earth (cf. Rev 21:14; McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, pp. 328–30). A fundamental flaw in RCC’s interpretation of Matt 16:19 is equating the kingdom of God/heaven with the church.
- 8) John 21:15 does not give Jesus’ post-resurrection confirmation of Peter’s absolute teaching and ruling authority. Rather, this is simply Jesus’ instruction to lovingly care for his followers.
 - Far from being Christ’s earthly representative, exercising His authority on earth as the vicar of Christ, the Pope leads a religious entity that spreads a false, anti-Christ gospel (cf. 1 John 2:18; 4:1–6).

A helpful reference on Catholicism:

James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995).