 Reading time: 142 min.

The culminating moment of the Jubilee Year for every believer is the passage through the Holy Door, a highly symbolic gesture that should be experienced with deep meditation. It is not a simple visit to admire the architectural, sculptural, or pictorial beauty of a basilica: the early Christians did not go to places of worship for this reason, also because at that time there was not much to admire. They came instead to pray before the relics of the holy apostles and martyrs, and to obtain indulgence through their powerful intercession.
Visiting the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul without knowing their lives is not a sign of appreciation. For this reason, in this Jubilee Year, we wish to present the faith journeys of these two glorious apostles, as narrated by Saint John Bosco.

The Life of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles told to the people by the priest John Bosco

You of little faith, why did you doubt? (Mt 14:31).

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PREFACE

In order to enter a closed building and take possession of it, it is necessary to gain favour with he who holds the keys.

Unfortunate is he who, finding himself on a small boat in the open sea, is not in the good graces of the pilot. The lost sheep, which is far from its shepherd, does not know his voice or does not listen to it.

Dear reader, your dwelling is Heaven, and you must aspire to reach it. As long as you live down here, you are navigating the treacherous sea of the world, in danger of hitting the rocks, of shipwrecking, and losing yourself in the depths of error.

Like a small sheep, every day you are on the verge of being led to harmful pastures, of straying through cliffs and ravines, and of falling into the jaws of ravenous wolves, that is, into the hidden dangers of the enemies of your soul. Ah! Yes, you need to win the favour of he to whom the keys of Heaven were entrusted. It is necessary that you entrust your life to the great Pilot of Christ’s Boat, to Noah of the New Testament. You must cling to the Supreme Shepherd of the Church, who alone can guide you to healthy pastures and lead you to life.

Now, the Porter of the Kingdom of Heaven, the great Helmsman and Shepherd of men is indeed St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, who exercises his power in the person of the Supreme Pontiff, his Successor. He still opens and reveals, he governs the Church and guides souls to salvation.

Therefore, pious reader, do not regret reading the brief life that I present to you here. Learn to know who he is, to respect his supreme authority of honour and jurisdiction. Learn to recognise the loving voice of the Shepherd and to listen to it. For whoever is with Peter is with God, walks in the light, and runs toward life. Whoever is not with Peter is against God, stumbles in the darkness, and falls into perdition. Where Peter is, there is life. Where Peter is not, there is death.

CHAPTER I. St. Peter’s homeland and profession. — His brother Andrew brings him to Jesus Christ[1]. *Year 29 of Jesus Christ*

St. Peter was Jewish by birth and the son of a poor fisherman named Jonah or John, who lived in a town of Galilee called Bethsaida. This town is located on the western shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, commonly called the Sea of Galilee or Tiberias. Actually, it is a vast lake twelve miles long and six wide.

Before the Saviour changed his name, Peter was called Simon. He practised the trade of a fisherman, like his father. He had a strong temperament, a lively and witty mind. He was quick to respond, but of a good heart and full of gratitude toward those who benefited him.

This lively nature often led him to the warmest displays of affection toward the Saviour, from whom he also received unmistakable signs of favouritism. At that time, since the value of virginity was not yet widely recognised, Peter took a wife in the city of Capernaum, the capital of Galilee, on the western bank of the Jordan, which is a great river that divides Palestine from north to south.

Since Tiberias was located where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee, and therefore very suitable for fishing, St. Peter established his ordinary residence in this city and continued to practise his usual trade. The goodness of his heart, very inclined to truth, the innocent occupation of a fisherman, and his diligence at work greatly contributed to his preservation in the holy fear of God.

At that time, the thought was widespread in everyone’s mind that the coming of the Messiah was imminent. Indeed, some were saying that he had already been born among the Jews. This was the reason that St. Peter used the utmost diligence to learn about it. He had an older brother named Andrew, who, captivated by the wonders that were told about St. John the Baptist, the Precursor of the Saviour, wanted to become his disciple, spending most of his time with him in a harsh desert.

The news, which was becoming more and more confirmed every day, that the Messiah had already been born, caused many to turn to St. John, believing that he himself was the Redeemer. Among these was St. Andrew, brother of Simon Peter. But it was not long before, instructed by John, he came to know Jesus Christ, and the first time he heard Him speak, he was so captivated that he immediately ran to inform his brother.

As soon as he saw him: “Simon,” he said, “I have found the Messiah; come with me to see Him”.

Simon, who had already heard something from others, albeit vaguely, immediately set out with his brother and went to where Andrew had left Jesus Christ. Peter, as soon as he cast a glance at the Saviour, was as if seized by love.

The Divine Master, who had conceived great plans for him, looked at him kindly and, before he spoke, showed him that He was fully informed of his name, his birth, and his homeland, saying: “You are Simon, son of John, but from now on you will be called Cephas”. This word means stone, from which the name Peter is derived. Jesus communicates to Simon that he would be called Peter because he was to be that stone upon which Jesus Christ would build His Church, as we will see in the course of this life.

In this first conversation, Peter immediately recognised that what his brother had told him was far inferior to reality, and from that moment on, he became very attached to Jesus Christ, nor did he know how to live away from Him. The Divine Saviour, moreover, allowed this new disciple to return to his previous trade because he wanted to gradually prepare him for the total abandonment of earthly things, to guide him to the highest degrees of virtue, and thus make him capable of understanding the other mysteries that he would reveal to him and make him worthy of the great power with which he wanted to invest him.

CHAPTER II. Peter takes the Saviour by boat — The miraculous catch. — He welcomes Jesus into his house. — Miracles performed. *Year 30 of Jesus Christ.*

Peter continued to practise his first profession. However, whenever time and his activities allowed, he joyfully went to the Divine Saviour to hear Him speak of the truths of faith and the Kingdom of Heaven.

One day, as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, He saw the two brothers Peter and Andrew casting their nets into the water. Calling them to Himself, He said to them: “Come with me, and, as you are fishermen, I will make you fishers of men.” They promptly obeyed the Redeemer’s call and, abandoning their nets, became faithful and constant followers of Him. Not far away was another boat of fishermen, in which there was a certain Zebedee with two sons, James and John, who were mending their nets. Jesus also called these two brothers to Himself. Peter, James, and John are the three disciples who received signs of special favour from the Saviour and who, for their part, showed themselves faithful and loyal to Him at every encounter.

Meanwhile, the crowd, having learned that the Saviour was there, gathered around Him to listen to His Divine Word. Wanting to satisfy the desire of the multitude and at the same time offer everyone the opportunity to hear Him, He did not want to preach from the shore, rather from one of the two boats that were near the shore. Also, to demonstrate another symbol of love to Peter, He chose his boat. Having boarded and also taken Peter aboard, He commanded him to put out a little from the shore and, sitting down, began to instruct that devoted assembly. After the

sermon, He ordered Peter to take the boat out into deep water and to cast the net to catch fish.

Peter had spent the entire previous night fishing in that very spot and had caught nothing. Therefore, turning to Jesus: “Master,” he said, “we have toiled all night fishing and have caught not even a fish; however, at Your word, I will cast the net into the sea.” He did so out of obedience, and, against all expectations, the catch was so abundant and the net so full of large fish that, trying to pull it out of the water, it was about to tear. Peter, unable to hold the great weight of the net by himself, asked for help from James and John, who were in the other boat, and they came to help him. Together and with difficulty, they pulled the net out, pouring the fish into the boats, which both remained so full that they risked sinking.

Peter, who was beginning to perceive the supernatural aspect in the person of the Saviour, immediately recognised that this was a miracle and, filled with astonishment, considering himself unworthy to be with Him in the same boat, humbled and confused, threw himself at His feet saying: “Lord, I am a miserable sinner, therefore I beg you to depart from me.” Almost as if to say: “Oh! Lord, I am not worthy to be in your presence.” Admiring the gifts of God, says St. Ambrose, he deserved all the more as he presumed less of himself[2].

Jesus appreciated Peter’s simplicity and the humility of his heart and, wanting him to open his soul to better hopes, comforted him by saying: “Do not be afraid; from now on you will not be a fisher of fish, but you will be a fisher of men.” At these words, Peter took courage and, almost transformed into another man, he brought the boat to the shore, abandoned everything, and became an inseparable companion of the Redeemer.

Since Jesus Christ, when speaking, directed the way to the city of Capernaum, then Peter went with Him. There they both entered the Synagogue, and the Apostle listened to the sermon that the Lord gave there and witnessed the miraculous healing of a possessed person.

From the Synagogue, Jesus went to Peter’s house where his mother-in-law was suffering from a very high fever. Together with Andrew, James, and John, he prayed to Jesus to please free that woman from the evil that oppressed her. The Divine Saviour granted their prayers and, approaching the sick woman’s bed, He took her by the hand, lifted her up, and at that moment the fever disappeared. The woman found herself so perfectly healed that she was able to get up immediately and prepare lunch for Jesus and all His company. The fame of such miracles brought many sick people to Peter’s house along with an innumerable crowd, so that the whole city seemed gathered there. Jesus restored health to all who were brought to Him, and everyone, filled with joy, departed praising and blessing the Lord.

The holy Fathers see in Peter's boat the Church, of which Jesus Christ is the head, in place of which Peter was to be the first to act as its representative, and after him all the Popes, his successors. The words spoken to Peter: "Take the boat out into deep water," and other words spoken to him and His Apostles: "Cast your nets to catch fish," also contain a noble meaning. To all the Apostles, says St. Ambrose, He commands to cast their nets into the waves. Because all the Apostles and all the shepherds are obliged to preach the Divine Word and to keep in the boat, that is, in the Church, those souls that will be won in their preaching. To Peter alone, however, it is commanded to take the boat out into deep water, because he, more than anyone else, is made a participant in the depth of the divine mysteries and he alone receives from Christ the authority to resolve the difficulties that may arise in matters of faith and morals. Thus, when the other apostles join him in his boat, the cooperation of the other shepherds is recognised, those who, joining with Peter, must help him to propagate and preserve the faith in the world and win souls for Christ[3].

CHAPTER III. St. Peter, head of the Apostles, is sent to preach. — Walking on the waves. — Beautiful response given to the Saviour. *Year 31 of Jesus Christ.*

Jesus left the house of Peter and went to a solitary place on a mountain to pray. Peter and the other disciples, who at that point had grown in number, followed Him. But when they reached the designated place, Jesus commanded them to stop and, all alone, withdrew to a secluded spot. When day broke, He returned to the disciples. On that occasion, the Divine Master chose twelve disciples, whom He named Apostles, which means those sent, since the Apostles were truly sent to preach the Gospel, at that time only in the lands of Judea, then throughout the whole world. Among these twelve, he appointed Saint Peter to hold the first place and to act as head so that, as Saint Jerome says, by establishing a superior among them, every occasion for discord and schism would be removed. *Ut capite constituto schismatis tolleretur occasio****[4]***.

The new preachers went with great zeal to announce the Gospel, preaching the coming of the Messiah everywhere and confirming their words with shining miracles. Then they would return to the Divine Master, as if to report on what they had done. He welcomed them kindly and would then go Himself to the place where the Apostles had preached. One day, the crowds, carried away by admiration and enthusiasm, wanted to make Him king, but He, commanding the Apostles to go to the opposite shore of the lake, distanced Himself from that good people and went to hide in the desert. The Apostles, according to the Master's orders, got into a boat to cross the lake. Night was already advancing, and they had almost reached the

shore when a storm arose so terrible that the ship, tossed by the waves and the wind, was about to sink.

In the midst of that storm, they certainly did not imagine they would see Jesus Christ, whom they had left on the opposite shore of the lake. But how surprised they were when they saw Him a short distance away walking on the waters, with a bold and swift step, advancing towards them! At first sight, they all were frightened, fearing that it was some spectre or ghost, and they began to cry out. Jesus then made His voice heard and encouraged them, saying: “It is I, have faith, do not be afraid.”

At those words, none of the Apostles dared to speak; only Peter, out of the fervour of his love for Jesus and to assure himself that it was not an illusion, said: “Lord, if it is really you, command me to come to you walking on the waters.” The Divine Saviour said yes, and Peter, full of confidence, jumped out of the boat and began to walk on the waves, as one would on a pavement. But Jesus, wanting to test his faith and make it more perfect, allowed a fierce wind to rise again, which, stirring the waves, threatened to drown Peter. Seeing his feet sinking in the water, he became frightened and cried out: “Master, Master, help me, otherwise I am lost.” Then Jesus reproached him for the weakness of his faith with these words: “Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?” Saying this, they both walked together on the waves until, entering the boat, the wind ceased and the storm calmed. In this event, the holy Fathers see the dangers in which the Head of the Church sometimes finds himself and the prompt help that Jesus Christ, its invisible Head, brings him, who indeed allows persecutions but always gives him victory.

Some time later, the Divine Saviour returned to the city of Capernaum with the Apostles, followed by a great crowd. While He was staying in this city, many crowded around Him, asking Him to teach them what the absolutely necessary works for salvation were. Jesus began to instruct them about His heavenly doctrine, the mystery of His Incarnation, the Sacrament of the Eucharist. However, since those teachings aimed to uproot pride from the hearts of men, to instil humility by obliging them to believe in the highest mysteries, and especially the mystery of mysteries, the Divine Eucharist, His listeners, considering those discourses too rigid and severe, were offended, and most of them abandoned Him.

Seeing Himself abandoned by almost all, Jesus turned to the Apostles and said: “Do you see how many are leaving? Do you also want to go away?” At this sudden question, everyone was silent. Only Peter, as the head and on behalf of all, replied: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and come to know that you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Saint Cyril reflects that this question was asked by Jesus Christ to stimulate them to confess

the true faith, as indeed happened through the mouth of Peter. What a difference between the response of our Apostle and the murmurs of certain Christians who find the holy law of the Gospel hard and severe because it does not accommodate their passions (Cyril in John, Book 4).

CHAPTER IV. Peter confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of God for the second time. — He is made head of the Church, and the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are promised to him. *Year 32 of Jesus Christ.*

On several occasions, the Divine Saviour had made the particular plans he had regarding Peter obvious. But he had not yet explained Himself so clearly, as we will see in the following event, which can be considered as the most memorable of this great Apostle's life. From the city of Capernaum, Jesus went to the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi, a city not far from the Jordan River. There one day, after praying, Jesus suddenly turned to His disciples, who had returned from preaching, and signalling them to come closer, began to question them: "Who do people say that I am?" "Some say", replied one of the Apostles, "that you are the prophet Elijah". "Others have said to me", added another, "that you are the prophet Jeremiah, or John the Baptist, or one of the ancient prophets risen." Peter did not say a word. Jesus resumed: "But you, who do you say that I am?" Peter then stepped forward and, on behalf of the other Apostles, answered: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus said: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. From now on, you will no longer be called Simon, but Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.[5]"

This event and these words deserve to be explained a bit so that they are well understood. Peter remained silent while Jesus was only showing that He wanted to know what people were saying about Him. Yet, when the Divine Saviour invited the Apostles to express their feelings, Peter immediately spoke on behalf of all, because he already enjoyed a primacy, or superiority, over his other companions.

Peter, divinely inspired, says: "You are the Christ," and it was the same as saying: "You are the Messiah promised by God who has come to save men; you are the Son of the living God," to signify that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God like the deities of idolaters, made by the hands and whims of men, but the Son of the living and true God, that is, the Son of the eternal Father, therefore with Him the Creator and Supreme Master of all things. Thus he came to confess Him as the second person of the Holy Trinity. Jesus, almost to reward him for his faith, calls him

Blessed, and in the meantime changes his name from Simon to Peter, a clear sign that he wanted to elevate him to great dignity. God had done so with Abraham when He made him the father of all believers. The same occurred with Sarah when He promised her the miraculous birth of a son, and with Jacob when He called him Israel and assured him that from his descendants the Messiah would be born.

Jesus said: “On this rock, I will build my Church.” These words mean: you, Oh Peter, will be in the Church what the foundation is in a house. The foundation is the main part of the house, entirely indispensable; you, Oh Peter, will be the foundation, that is, the supreme authority in my Church. On the foundation, the whole house is built, so that, being supported, it may endure firm and immovable. Upon you, whom I call Peter, as upon a rock or very firm stone, by my omnipotent virtue, I raise the eternal edifice of my Church, which, supported by you, will stand strong and invincible against all the assaults of its enemies. There is no house without a foundation. There is no Church without Peter. A house without a foundation is not the work of a wise architect. A Church separated from Peter can never be my Church. In houses, the parts that do not rest on the foundation fall and go to ruin. In my Church, whoever separates from Peter, falls into error and is lost.

“The gates of Hell will never prevail against my Church.” The gates of Hell, as the Holy Fathers explain, signify heresies, heresiarchs, persecutions, public scandals, and the disorders that the devil seeks to stir up against the Church. All these infernal powers may indeed, either separately or together, wage fierce war against the Church and disturb its peaceful spirit, but they will never be able to conquer it.

Finally, Christ says: “And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” The keys are the symbol of authority. When the seller of a house hands the keys to the buyer, it is understood that he gives him full and absolute possession. Similarly, when the keys of a city are presented to a King, it signifies that that city recognises him as its lord. Thus, the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, of the Church, given to Peter, demonstrate that he is made master, prince, and governor of the Church. Therefore, Jesus Christ adds to Peter: “Whatever you bind on earth shall also be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall also be loosed in Heaven.” These words clearly indicate the supreme authority given to Peter. It is the authority to bind the consciences of men with decrees and laws concerning their spiritual and eternal good, and the authority to loose them from sins and penalties that hinder the same spiritual and eternal good.

It is good to note here that the true supreme Head of the Church is Jesus Christ, its founder. Saint Peter then exercises his supreme authority by performing the functions, that is, the duties, of Him on earth. Jesus Christ did with Peter, as

kings of this world do, when they give full powers to some minister with the order that everything must depend on him. Thus, King Pharaoh gave such power to Joseph that no one could move hand or foot without his permission[6].

It should also be noted that the other Apostles received from Jesus Christ the power to bind and loose[7], but this power was given to them after Saint Peter had received it alone, to indicate that he alone was the head destined to preserve the unity of faith and morals. The other Apostles, and all the bishops who succeeded them, were to always depend on Peter and his successors, in order to remain united to Jesus Christ, who from Heaven assists his Vicar and the whole Church until the end of the ages. Peter received the power to bind and loose together with the other Apostles, and thus he and his successors are equal to the Apostles and bishops. Then he received it alone, and therefore Peter and his successors, the popes, are the supreme Heads of the whole Church, not only of the simple faithful but of all priests and bishops. They are bishops and pastors of Rome, and popes and pastors of the whole Church.

With what we have presented, the Divine Saviour promises to establish Saint Peter as the supreme head of His Church, and explains to him the greatness of his authority. We will see the fulfilment of this promise after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER V. Saint Peter dissuades the Divine Master from the Passion. — He goes with Him to Mount Tabor. *Year 32 of Jesus Christ.*

The Divine Redeemer, after having made known to His disciples how He built His Church on stable, unshakeable, and eternal foundations, wanted to give them a teaching so that they would understand well that He did not establish this Kingdom of His, that is, His Church, with wealth or worldly magnificence, rather with humility and suffering. With this purpose, He manifested to St. Peter and all His disciples the long series of sufferings and the disgraceful death that the Jews would make Him endure in Jerusalem. Peter, out of the great love he had for his Divine Master, was horrified to hear of the evils to which his sacred person was to be exposed, and, carried away by the affection that a tender son has for his father, he took Him aside and began to persuade Him to go far from Jerusalem to avoid those evils and concluded: “Far be it from you, Lord, these evils.” Jesus rebuked him for his overly sensitive affection, saying: “Get behind me, adversary; your words are a stumbling block to me: you do not yet savour the things of God, but only the things of men.” “Behold,” says St. Augustine, “that same Peter who a little earlier had confessed him as the Son of God, here fears that He will die as the Son of man.”

At the moment when the Redeemer manifested the mistreatments He was

to suffer at the hands of the Jews, He promised that some of the Apostles, before He died, would taste a sample of His glory, and this to confirm them in faith and so that they would not be disheartened when they saw Him exposed to the humiliations of the Passion. Therefore, a few days later, Jesus chose three Apostles: Peter, James, and John, and led them up a mountain commonly called Tabor. In the presence of these three disciples, He was transfigured, that is, He allowed a ray of His divinity to shine through around His most sacred person. At that moment, a dazzling light surrounded Him, and His face became like the brightness of the sun, and His garments white as snow. Peter, when he arrived on the mountain, perhaps tired from the journey, had laid down to sleep with the other two. But all at that moment, waking up, he saw the glory of their Divine Master. At the same time, Moses and Elijah also appeared. Upon seeing the Saviour shining, at the appearance of those two figures and that unusual splendour, Peter, astonished, wanted to speak and did not know what to say, and almost beside himself, considering every human greatness as nothing in comparison to that glimpse of paradise, he felt a burning desire to remain there forever with his Master. Then, turning to Jesus, he said: “Oh Lord, how good it is to be here: if You wish, let us make three tents here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Peter, as the Gospel attests, was out of his mind and spoke without knowing what he was saying. It was a transport of love for his Master and a vivid desire for happiness. He was still speaking when, after Moses and Elijah had disappeared, a wonderful cloud came and enveloped the three Apostles. At that moment, from the midst of that cloud, a voice was heard saying: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; listen to Him.” Then the three Apostles, increasingly terrified, fell to the ground as if dead. But the Redeemer, approaching, touched them with His hand and, encouraging them, raised them to their feet. When they raised their eyes, they no longer saw anyone, neither Moses nor Elijah. There was only Jesus in His natural state. Jesus commanded them not to reveal that vision to anyone, except after His death and Resurrection[8]. After this event, those three disciples’ love grew immensely for Jesus. St. John Damascene explains why Jesus preferred to choose these three Apostles, saying that Peter, having been the first to bear witness to the divinity of the Saviour, deserved to be the first to sensibly behold His glorified humanity. James also had this privilege because he was to be the first to follow his Master with martyrdom. St. John had the virgin merit that made him worthy of this honour[9].

The Catholic Church celebrates the venerable event of the transfiguration of the Saviour on Mount Tabor on the sixth of August.

CHAPTER VI. Jesus raises Jairus’ daughter in Peter’s presence. — He pays the temple

tax for Peter. — He teaches His disciples humility. *Year 32 of Jesus Christ.*

Meanwhile, the time was approaching when Peter's faith was to be tested. Therefore, the Divine Master, to inflame him more and more with love for Him, often gave him new signs of affection and kindness. When Jesus came to a part of Palestine called the land of the Gerasenes, a ruler of the synagogue named Jairus came to Him, begging Him to restore life to his only daughter, who had just died. Jesus wanted to grant his request, but upon arriving at his house, He forbade everyone to enter, and only took with him Peter, James, and John, so that they would be witnesses of that miracle.

The next day, Jesus, moving a bit away from the other disciples, entered with Peter into the city of Capernaum to go to his house. At the city gate, the tax collectors, that is, those appointed by the government to collect taxes and duties, pulled Peter aside and said to him: "Does your Master pay the temple tax?" "Certainly," replied Peter. Having said this, he entered the house, where the Lord had preceded him. When the Saviour saw him, to whom all things were manifest, He called him and said: "Tell me, Peter, who are those who pay tribute? Are they the sons of the king, or the strangers of the royal family?" Peter replied: "They are the strangers." "Then," Jesus continued, "the sons of the king are exempt from all taxes." This meant: "Therefore, I who am, as you yourself have declared, the Son of the living God, am not obliged to pay anything to the princes of the earth. However, these good people do not know me as you do, and they might take offense. Therefore, I intend to pay the temple tax. Go to the sea, cast a hook, and in the mouth of the first fish you catch, you will find the coin to pay the tribute for me and for you." The Apostle did as he was commanded, and after a little while returned full of wonder with the coin indicated by the Saviour. So the tax was paid.

The Holy Fathers admired two things in this event: the humility and meekness of Jesus, who submits to the laws of men, and the honour He deigned to give to the Apostle Peter, equating him with Himself and openly showing him as His Vicar.

The other Apostles, when they learned of the preference given to Peter, being still very imperfect in virtue, were envious. Therefore, they went among themselves disputing who among them was the greatest. Jesus, who little by little wanted to correct them of their faults, when they came into His presence, made them understand how the greatness of Heaven is very different from that of the earth, and that whoever wants to be first in Heaven must become last on earth. He then said to them: "Who is the greatest? Who is the first in a family? Perhaps the one who sits at the table, or the one who serves at the table? Certainly the one who sits at the table. Now what do you see in me? What character do I represent?

Certainly that of a poor servant at the table."

This warning was primarily meant for Peter, who in the world was to receive great honours for his dignity, and yet must remain in humility and call himself the servant of the servants of the Lord, as the Popes, his successors, usually do.

CHAPTER VII. Peter speaks with Jesus about the forgiveness of insults and detachment from earthly things. — He refuses to let his feet be washed. — His friendship with St. John. *Year 33 of Christ.*

One day the Divine Saviour began to teach the Apostles about the forgiveness of offenses, and having said that any outrage should be endured and any insult forgiven, Peter was filled with astonishment. This was because he was prejudiced, like all the Jews, in favour of Jewish traditions, which allowed the offended person to inflict a penalty on the offender, called the penalty of retaliation. He therefore turned to Jesus and said: "Master, if the enemy were to insult us seven times and seven times came to ask for forgiveness, should I forgive him seven times?" Jesus, who had come to mitigate the rigors of the old law with the holiness and purity of the Gospel, replied to Peter that "not only should he forgive seven times, but seventy times seven," an expression that means one must always forgive. The Holy Fathers recognise in this event primarily the obligation that every Christian has to forgive every affront to his neighbour, at all times and in all places. Secondly, they recognise the authority given by Jesus to St. Peter and to all sacred ministers to forgive the sins of men, whatever their gravity and number, provided they are repentant and promise sincere amendment.

On another day, Jesus was teaching the people, speaking of the great reward that those who despised the world and made good use of riches would receive, detaching their hearts from the goods of the earth. Peter, who had not yet received the light of the Holy Spirit and who more than the others needed to be instructed, with his usual frankness turned to Jesus and said: "Master, we have abandoned everything and followed you: we have done what you commanded. What then will be the reward you will give us?" The Saviour appreciated Peter's question and, while praising the detachment of the Apostles from all earthly thing, assured them that a special reward was reserved for them because, having left their possessions, they had followed him. "You," he said, "who have followed me, will sit on twelve majestic thrones and, companions in my glory, will judge with me the twelve tribes of Israel and with them all of humanity."

Not long after, Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem and began to discuss with Peter about the structure of that grand building and the preciousness of the stones that adorned it. The Divine Saviour then took the opportunity to predict its

complete ruin, saying: “Of this magnificent temple, there will not remain one stone upon another.” Then Jesus, in leaving the city and passing near a fig tree that he had cursed, Peter, amazed, pointed out to the Divine Master how that tree had already become withered and dry. It was a proof of the truth of the Saviour’s promises. Therefore, Jesus, to encourage the Apostles to have faith, replied that by virtue of faith they would obtain everything they asked for.

The virtue, moreover, that Christ wanted deeply rooted in the hearts of the Apostles and especially of Peter, was humility, and He gave them luminous examples of this on many occasions, especially on the eve of His Passion. It was the first day of the Passover of the Jews, which was to last seven days and is usually called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus sent Peter and John to Jerusalem saying: “Go and prepare the necessary things for the Passover.” They said: “Where do you want us to prepare them?” Jesus replied: “Entering the city, you will meet a man carrying a pitcher of water. Go with him, and he will show you a large upper room furnished, and there prepare what is needed for this purpose.” So they did. When evening came on that night, which was the last of the Saviour’s mortal life, wanting to institute the Sacrament of the Eucharist, he began an act that demonstrates the purity of soul with which every Christian must approach this sacrament of divine love, and at the same time serves to curb the pride of men until the end of the world. While He was at table with His disciples, towards the end of the meal, the Lord rose from the table, took a towel, girded Himself, and poured water into a basin, showing that He wanted to wash the feet of the Apostles, who, seated and amazed, were watching what their Master wanted to do.

Jesus then came with the water to Peter and, kneeling before him, asked him for his foot to wash. Good Peter, horrified to see the Son of God in that act of a poor servant, still remembering that he had just seen him shining with light, full of shame and almost in tears, said: “What are you doing, Master, what are you doing? You wash my feet? Never! I can never allow it.” The Saviour said to him: “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand later. Therefore, be careful not to contradict me. If I do not wash your feet, you will have no part with me,” that is, you will be deprived of all my goods and be disinherited. At these words, good Peter was terribly troubled. On one hand, he was pained to be separated from his Master. He did not want to disobey him or sadden him. On the other hand, he thought he could not allow such a humble service to Him. However, when he understood that the Saviour wanted obedience, he said: “O Lord, since you wish it so, I must not and do not want to resist your will. Do with me whatever you please. If it is not enough to wash my feet, wash my hands and my head as well.”

The Saviour, after having completed that act of profound humility, turned to

his Apostles and said to them: “Have you seen what I have done? If I, who am your Master and Lord, have washed your feet, you must do likewise among yourselves.” These words mean that a follower of Jesus Christ must never refuse any work, even humble, of charity, whenever it promotes the good of the neighbour and the glory of God.

During this dinner, an event occurred that particularly concerns St. Peter and St. John. It has already been observed how the Divine Redeemer had a special affection for these two Apostles: one for the sublime dignity to which he was destined, the other for the singular purity of conduct. They, in turn, loved their Saviour with the most intense love, and were bound to each other by the bonds of a very special friendship, of which the Redeemer Himself showed pleasure, because it was founded on virtue.

While Jesus was at the table with His Apostles, in the middle of the meal, He predicted that one of them would betray him. At this announcement, everyone was frightened, and each fearing for himself, began to look at one another saying: “Is it I?” Peter, being more fervent in love for his Master, desired to know who that traitor was. He wanted to ask Jesus, but to do so secretly, so that none of those present would notice. Therefore, without saying a word, he signalled to John to be the one to ask that question. This beloved apostle had taken a place close to Jesus, and his position was such that he rested his head on his chest, while Peter’s head rested on John’s. John satisfied the desire of his friend with such secrecy that none of the Apostles could understand either Peter’s signal, or John’s inquiry, or Christ’s response. For at that time, no one came to know that the traitor was Judas Iscariot, except for the two privileged apostles.

CHAPTER VIII. Jesus predicts Peter’s denial and assures him that his faith will not fail. — Peter follows him to the Garden of Gethsemane. — He cuts off Malchus’s ear. — His fall, his repentance. *Year 33 of Christ.*

As the time of the Saviour’s passion approached, the faith of the Apostles was to be put to a severe test. After the Last Supper, when Jesus was about to leave the upper room, He turned to His Apostles and said: “This night is very painful for me and of great danger for all of you: such things will happen to me that you will be scandalised, and what you have known and now believe about me will no longer seem true to you. Therefore, I tell you that this night you will all turn your backs on me.” Peter, following his usual fervour, was the first to respond: “What? All of us turn our backs on you? Even if all these were so weak as to abandon you, I certainly will never do so. In fact, I am ready to die with you.” “Ah Simon, Simon,” replied Jesus Christ, “behold, Satan has devised a terrible temptation against you, and he

will sift you like wheat; and you yourself, this night, before the rooster crows twice, will deny me three times." Peter spoke guided by a warm feeling of affection and did not consider that without divine help, man falls into deplorable excesses. Therefore, he renewed the same promises saying: "No, certainly; it may be that all deny you, but I never will." Jesus, who well knew that such presumption of Peter came from thoughtless fervour and great tenderness towards him, had compassion for him and added: "You will certainly fall, Oh Peter, as I told you. However, do not lose heart. I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and you, when you have turned back from your fall, confirm your brothers: *Rogavi pro te, ut non deficiat fides tua, et tu aliquando conversus, confirma fratres tuos*." With these words, the Divine Saviour promised a particular assistance to the Head of His Church, so that his faith may never fail, that is to say, that as the universal Teacher in matters concerning religion and morality, he taught and will always teach the truth, although in private life he may fall into sin, as indeed happened to St. Peter.

Meanwhile, Jesus Christ, after that memorable Eucharistic Supper, late at night left the upper room with the eleven Apostles and went to the Mount of Olives. When he arrived there, he took with him Peter, James, and John, and withdrew to a part of that mountain called Gethsemane, where He was accustomed to go to pray. Jesus moved away from the three Apostles as far as a stone's throw and began to pray. Before doing so, in the act of separating from them, He warned them saying: "Watch and pray, for temptation is near." But Peter and his companions, both because of the late hour and their fatigue, sat down to rest and fell asleep.

This was a new fault of Peter, who was to follow the Saviour's command by watching and praying. In the meantime, the guards arrived in the garden to capture Jesus and take Him to prison. Peter, seeing them just then, ran to meet them to drive them away, and seeing that they were resisting, he drew the sword he had with him and, striking wildly, cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest Caiaphas, named Malchus.

These were not the testimonies of loyalty that Jesus expected from Peter, nor had He ever taught him to oppose force with force. This was an effect of his fervent love for the Divine Saviour but out of purpose. Hence Jesus said to Peter: "Put your sword back in its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Then, putting into practise what He had taught many times in His preaching, that is to do good to those who do evil to us, he took the severed ear and, with great kindness, restored it with his holy hands to its place, so that it was instantly healed.

Peter and the other Apostles, seeing that all resistance was useless and that they would rather run the risk for themselves, set aside the promises made shortly

before to the Master, fled and abandoned Jesus, leaving Him alone in the hands of His executioners. Peter, on the other hand, ashamed of his cowardice, confused and indecisive, did not know where to go or where to stay. Therefore, from a distance, he followed Jesus to the courtyard of the palace of Caiaphas, the head of all the Jewish priests, and through the recommendation of an acquaintance, he managed to enter. Jesus was there inside in the power of the Scribes and Pharisees, who had accused Him before that tribunal and were trying to have Him condemned with some appearance of justice.

As soon as he entered that place, our Apostle found a crowd of guards warming themselves by the fire that was lit there, and he sat down with them. In the light of the flames, the servant girl who had graciously let him in, seeing him pensive and melancholic, began to suspect that he was a follower of Jesus. “Hey,” she said to him, “you seem to be a companion of the Nazarene, don’t you?” The Apostle, seeing himself discovered in front of so many people, was astonished. Fearing imprisonment for himself, perhaps even death, having lost all courage, he replied: “Woman, you are mistaken. I am not one of them. I do not even know that Jesus of whom you speak.” Having said this, the rooster crowed for the first time, and Peter did not pay attention to it.

After staying for a moment in the company of those guards, he went to the vestibule. While returning to the fire, another servant girl, pointing to Peter, also began to say to those around: “This man was also with Jesus of Nazareth.” The poor disciple, even more frightened by these words, almost beside himself, replied that he did not know Him nor had he ever seen Him. Peter spoke this way, but his conscience reproached him and he felt the sharpest remorse. Therefore, all pensive, with a troubled eye and uncertain step, he stood, went in and out without knowing what to do. However, deep calls to deep.

After a few moments, a relative of that Malchus whose ear Peter had cut off saw him and, fixing his gaze on him, said: “Certainly this man is one of the companions of the Galilean! You are certainly, your speech betrays you. And did I not see you in the garden with him when you cut off Malchus’s ear?” Peter, seeing himself in such a bad situation, could find no other escape than to swear and deny that he knew Him. He had not yet finished uttering the last syllable when the rooster crowed for the second time.

When the rooster crowed the first time, Peter had not paid attention, but this second time he took note of the number of his denials, recalled the prediction of Jesus Christ and saw it precisely fulfilled. At this memory, he was troubled, his heart felt all bitter, and turning his gaze towards good Jesus, his gaze met His. This glance from Christ was a mute act, but at the same time a stroke of grace, which,

like a sharp arrow, went to pierce his heart, not to give him death, but to restore him to life[10].

At that moment of kindness and mercy, Peter, shaken as if from a deep sleep, felt his heart swell and was moved to tears by sorrow. To give free rein to his weeping, he left that ill-fated place and went to weep for his fault, invoking forgiveness from divine mercy. The Gospel tells us only that: *et egressus Petrus flevit amare*: Peter went out and wept bitterly. The holy Apostle bore remorse all his life for this fall, and it can be said that from that hour until his death he did nothing but weep for his sin, doing harsh penance for it. It is said that he always had a cloth nearby to dry his tears, and that every time he heard the rooster crow, he would start and tremble, recalling the painful moment of his fall. Indeed, the tears he had continually made two furrows on his cheeks. Blessed Peter who so quickly abandoned sin and did such long and harsh penance for it! Blessed also is that Christian who, after having the misfortune of following Peter in sin, also follows him in repentance.

CHAPTER IX. Peter at the tomb of the Saviour. — Jesus appears to him. — On the lake of Tiberias, he gives three distinct signs of love towards Jesus, who effectively makes him the head and supreme shepherd of the Church.

While the Divine Saviour was being dragged through various Tribunals and then led to Calvary to die on the Cross, Peter did not lose sight of Him, for he desired to see where that mournful spectacle would end.

And although the Gospel does not say so, there are reasons to believe that he was with his friend John at the foot of the Cross. But after the death of the Saviour, good Peter, all humbled by the unworthy way in which he had responded to the great love of Jesus, continually thought of Him, oppressed by the most bitter sorrow and repentance.

However, this humiliation of his was precisely what attracted the kindness of Jesus towards Peter. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared primarily to Mary Magdalene and to other pious women, because they alone were at the tomb to embalm Him. After revealing Himself to them, he added: “Go quickly, tell my brothers and especially Peter that you have seen me alive.” Peter, who perhaps thought he was already forgotten by the Master, upon hearing from Jesus the news of the Resurrection announced to him by name, burst into a torrent of tears and could no longer contain the joy in his heart.

Carried away by joy and the desire to see the Risen Master, he, in the company of his friend John, began to run quickly up Mount Calvary. Their spirits, however, were then agitated by two opposing feelings: the hope of seeing Jesus

risen and the fear that the report made to them by the pious women was only the effect of their imagination, for at first they did not understand how He was truly to rise. Meanwhile, they both ran together, but John, being younger and swifter, reached the tomb before Peter. However, he did not have the courage to enter and, bending down a little at the entrance, saw the wrappings in which the body of Jesus had been wrapped. Shortly after, Peter also arrived, who, whether because of the greater authority he knew he enjoyed, or because he was of a more resolute and ready character, without stopping outside, immediately entered the tomb, examined it in all its parts, searching and feeling everywhere, and saw nothing but the wrappings and the cloth rolled up apart. Following Peter's example, John then also entered, and they both agreed that the body of Jesus had been taken away from the tomb and stolen. For although they ardently desired that the Divine Master had risen, they still did not believe in this sweetest truth. The two Apostles, after making such minute observations in the tomb, went out and returned to where they had come from. But on that same day, Jesus wanted to visit Peter in person to comfort him with His presence and, what is more, appeared to Peter before all the other Apostles.

The Divine Saviour manifested Himself to His Apostles several times after the Resurrection to instruct and confirm them in the faith.

One day, Peter, James, and John with some other disciples, both to avoid idleness and to earn something to eat, went fishing on the lake of Tiberias. They all got into a boat, moved it a little away from the shore, and cast their nets. They toiled all night casting the nets now here, now there, but all in vain. Day was breaking and they had caught nothing. Then the Lord appeared on the shore, where, without making Himself known, as if He wanted to buy some fish: "Children," He said to them, "do you have anything to eat?" "*Pueri, numquid pulmentarium habetis?*" "No," they replied, "we have toiled all night and have caught nothing." Jesus added: "Cast the net on the right side of the boat and you will catch." Whether they were moved by an inner impulse, or whether to follow the advice of the one who seemed to them an expert fisherman, they cast down the net and shortly after found it full of so many and such large fish that they could hardly pull it out. At this unexpected catch, John turned to the one who had given that suggestion from the shore and, having recognised that it was Jesus, said immediately to Peter: "It is the Lord." Peter, hearing these words, carried away by his usual fervour, without further consideration threw himself into the water and swam to the shore to be the first to greet the Divine Master. While Peter was staying familiarly with Jesus, the other Apostles also approached, dragging the net behind them.

When they landed, they found the fire lit by the very hand of the Divine

Saviour and bread prepared with fish that was roasting. The Apostles, moved by the desire to see the Lord, left all the fish in the boat, so the Saviour said to them: “Bring here those fish that you have just caught.” Peter, who was the quickest and most obedient in everything, upon hearing that order, immediately went up into the boat and alone pulled the net full of 153 large fish to shore.

The sacred text warns us that it was a miracle that the net was not torn, although there were so many fish and so big. The holy Fathers see in this fact the divine power of the head of the Church, who, assisted in a particular way by the Holy Spirit, guides the mystical ship full of souls to lead them to the feet of Jesus Christ, who has redeemed them and awaits them in Heaven.

Meanwhile, Jesus had prepared the meal Himself, and inviting the Apostles to sit on the bare sand, He distributed to each of them bread and fish that He had roasted. After the meal, Jesus Christ began to speak again with St. Peter and to question him in front of his companions in the following manner: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes,” replied Peter, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him: “Feed my lambs.” Then he asked him again: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” “Lord,” replied Peter, “you know well that I love you.” Jesus repeated: “Feed my lambs.” The Lord added: “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter, seeing himself questioned three times on the same subject, was greatly troubled. At that moment, the promises he had made before returned to his mind, which he had violated, and therefore he feared that Jesus Christ did not see in his heart a love much less than he thought he had, and wanted to predict other denials. Therefore, distrusting his own strength, Peter humbly replied: “Lord, you know everything, and therefore you know that I love you.” These words meant that Peter was sure at that moment of the sincerity of his affections, but he was not equally sure for the future. Jesus, who knew his desire to love Him and the sincerity of his affections, comforted him saying: “Feed my sheep.” With these words, the Son of God fulfilled the promise made to St. Peter to make him the prince of the Apostles and the foundational stone of the Church. In fact, the lambs here signify all the faithful Christians, scattered in various parts of the world, who must be subject to the Head of the Church, just as lambs do to their shepherd. The sheep then signify the bishops and other sacred ministers, who indeed provide the pasture of the doctrine of Jesus Christ to the faithful Christians, but always in agreement, always united and subject to the supreme shepherd of the Church, who is the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth.

Based on these words of Jesus Christ, Catholics of all times have always believed as a truth of faith that St. Peter was appointed by Jesus Christ as His Vicar on earth and the visible head of the whole Church, and that he received from Him

the fullness of authority over the other apostles and all the faithful. This authority passed to the Roman Pontiffs, his successors. This was defined as a dogma of faith at the Florentine Council in the year 1439, with the following words: “We define that the holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff is the successor of the Prince of the Apostles, the true Vicar of Christ and the head of the whole Church, the teacher and father of all Christians, and that to him in the person of blessed Peter was given by our Lord Jesus Christ full power to feed, rule, and govern the Universal Church.”

The holy Fathers also note that the Divine Redeemer wanted Peter to publicly say three times that he loved Him, almost to repair the scandal he had given by denying Him three times.

CHAPTER X. Infallibility of St. Peter and his successors.

The Divine Saviour gave the Apostle Peter the supreme power in the Church, namely the primacy of honour and jurisdiction, which we will soon see exercised by him. But in order for him, as the head of the Church, to exercise this supreme authority properly, Jesus Christ also endowed him with a singular prerogative, namely, infallibility. Since this is one of the most important truths, I believe it is good to add something in confirmation and declaration of the doctrine that the Catholic Church has professed at all times regarding this dogma.

First of all, it is necessary to understand what is meant by infallibility. It means that the Pope, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, fulfilling the office of Pastor or Teacher of all Christians, and judges matters concerning faith or morals, cannot, by divine assistance, fall into error, thus neither deceive himself nor deceive others. It should be noted, therefore, that infallibility does not extend to all actions, to all words of the Pope. It does not pertain to him as a private man, but only as Head, Pastor, Teacher of the Church, and when he defines some doctrine concerning faith or morals and intends to bind all the faithful. Furthermore, infallibility should not be confused with impeccability. Indeed, Jesus Christ promised the first to Peter and his successors in instructing men, but not the second, in which He did not wish to privilege them.

That said, we say that one of the best-proven truths is precisely that of doctrinal infallibility, granted by God to the Head of the Church. The words of Jesus Christ cannot fail, for they are God’s words. Now, Jesus Christ said to Peter: “You are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

According to these words, the gates[11], that is, the infernal powers, among

which error and falsehood hold the first place, will never prevail against either the Rock or the Church that is founded upon it. But if Peter, as Head of the Church, were to err in matters of faith and morals, it would be as if the foundation were lacking. If this were lacking, the building, that is, the Church itself, would fall, and thus the foundation and the structure would have to be said to be defeated and brought down by the gates of Hell. Now, this, after the aforementioned words, is not possible, unless one wishes to blaspheme by asserting that the promises of the Divine Founder were fallible: a horrible thing not only for Catholics but for the schismatics and heretics themselves.

Moreover, Jesus Christ assured that everything Peter, as Head of the Church, would bind or loose, approve or condemn on earth would be ratified in Heaven. Therefore, since error cannot be approved in Heaven, it must necessarily be admitted that the Head of the Church is infallible in his judgments, in his decisions made as the Vicar of Jesus Christ, so that he, as teacher and judge of all the faithful, does not approve or condemn anything that cannot be equally approved or condemned in Heaven. This leads to infallibility.

This is even more evident in the words that Jesus Christ addressed to Peter when He commanded him to confirm the other Apostles in faith: “Simon, Simon,” he said, “behold, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and when you have returned, strengthen your brothers.” Jesus Christ, therefore, prays that the faith of the Pope may not fail. Now it is impossible that the prayer of the Son of God should not be granted. Furthermore: Jesus commanded Peter to confirm the other pastors in faith and to have them listen to him. Yet, if he had not also communicated doctrinal infallibility to him, He would have put him in danger of deceiving them and dragging them into the abyss of error. Can it be believed that Jesus Christ wished to leave the Church and its Head in such danger?

Finally, the Divine Redeemer, after His Resurrection, established Peter as the supreme Pastor of His flock, that is, of His Church, entrusting to him the care of the lambs and the sheep: “Feed my lambs,” He said to him, “feed my sheep.” Instruct, teach both the lambs and the sheep, guiding them to pastures of eternal life. But if Peter were to err in matters of doctrine, either through ignorance or malice, then he would be like a shepherd leading the lambs and the sheep to poisoned pastures, which would give them death instead of life. Now, can it be supposed that Jesus Christ, who gave everything for the salvation of His little sheep, wished to establish such a shepherd for them?

Hence, according to the Gospel, the Apostle Peter had the gift of infallibility:

I. Because he is the fundamental Rock of the Church of Jesus Christ;

II. Because his judgments must also be confirmed in Heaven;

III. Because Jesus Christ prayed for his infallibility, and His prayer cannot fail;

IV. Because he must confirm in faith, feed, and govern not only the simple faithful but also the pastors themselves.

It is now useful to add that together with the supreme authority over the whole Church, the gift of infallibility passed from Peter to his successors, that is, to the Roman Pontiffs.

This is also a truth of faith.

Jesus Christ, as we have seen, gave broader power and endowed Saint Peter with the gift of infallibility in order to provide for the unity and integrity of faith in his followers. “Among twelve, one is elected,” reflects the greatest doctor Saint Jerome, “so that, with a Head established, every occasion of schism may be removed: *Inter duodecim unus eligitur, ut, capite constituto, schismatis tolleretur occasio*.[12]” “The primacy is conferred on Peter,” wrote Saint Cyprian, “so that the Church may be shown to be one, and one the chair of truth.[13]”

That being said, we say: the need for unity and truth did not exist only at the time of the Apostles, but also in the subsequent centuries. Indeed, this need increased even more with the expansion of the Church itself and with the passing of the Apostles, who were privileged by Jesus Christ with extraordinary gifts for the promulgation of the Gospel. Therefore, according to the intention of the Divine Saviour, the authority and infallibility of the first Pope were not to cease at his death, but to be transmitted to another, thus perpetuating in the Church.

This transmission is made very clear especially by the words of Jesus Christ to Peter, with which He established him as the base, the foundation of the Church. It is evident that the foundation must last as long as the building. This is impossible without that. But the building, which is the Church, must last until the end of the world, having promised the same Jesus to be with His Church until the end of time: “And behold, I am with you all days, until the end of the world.” Therefore, until the end of time, the foundation that is Peter must last, but since Peter is dead, authority and infallibility must still exist in someone else. They indeed exist in his successors in the See of Rome, that is, they exist in the Roman Pontiffs. Therefore, it can be said that Peter still lives and judges in his successors. Thus indeed expressed themselves the legates of the Apostolic See, with the applause of the general Council of Ephesus in the year 431: “Who until this time, and always in his successors, lives and exercises judgment.”

For this reason, from the very first centuries of the Church, when religious questions arose, recourse was made to the Church of Rome, and its decisions and judgments were held as a rule of faith. Let the words of Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of

Lyon, who died a martyr in the year 202, suffice as proof. “To confuse,” he wrote, “all those who in any way for vain glory, for blindness or malice gather in councils, it will suffice to indicate to them the tradition and the faith that the greatest and oldest of all churches, the Church known to the whole world, the Roman Church, founded and established by the glorious Apostles Peter and Paul, has announced to men and transmitted to us through the succession of its bishops. Indeed, to this Church, because of its preeminent primacy, every Church, that is, all the faithful from whatever part they may be, must recourse.[14]”

Regarding the infallibility of the Pope, some heretics, including Protestants and the so-called Old Catholics, deny it, saying that only God is infallible.

We do not deny that God alone is infallible by nature; but we say that He can grant the gift of infallibility even to a man, assisting him in such a way that he does not go astray. God alone can perform true miracles. Yet we know from Sacred Scripture itself that many men did so, and astonishingly. They performed them not by their own virtue, but by divine virtue communicated to them. Thus, the Pope is not infallible by his own nature, but by virtue of Jesus Christ, who willed it so for the good of the Church.

Moreover, the Protestants and their followers, who still believe in the Gospel, should not make such a fuss because we Catholics hold a man to be infallible when he serves as our supreme and universal teacher. Indeed, those still with us, without believing they are doing wrong to God, consider at least four to be infallible, namely the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Actually, they consider all the sacred writers of both the New and Old Testaments to be infallible. Now, if it is possible, rather necessary, to believe in the infallibility of those men who transmitted to us in writing the Word of God, what can prevent us from believing in the infallibility of another man destined to preserve it intact and explain it to us in the name of God Himself?

Reason itself suggests to us that it is very fitting that Jesus Christ granted the gift of infallibility to His Vicar, the Teacher of all the faithful. And what? If a wise and loving father has children to be educated, is it not true that he chooses the most learned and wisest teacher he can find? Is it not also true that if this father could give that teacher the gift of never deceiving the child, either through ignorance or malice, he would communicate it to him wholeheartedly? Now, all men, especially Christians, are children of God. The Pope is their great Teacher established by Him. Now, God could confer upon him the gift of never falling into error when teaching them. Who then can reasonably admit that this most excellent Father did not do what we miserable beings would do?

Throughout the centuries and by all true Catholics, the infallibility of the

successor of Peter has been constantly believed. But in recent times, some heretics arose to challenge it. Indeed, from the lack of an express definition, even some poorly advised Catholics took the opportunity to doubt it. Therefore, on July 18, 1870, the Vatican Council, composed of over 700 Bishops presided over by the immortal Pius IX, in order to protect the faithful from every error, solemnly defined papal infallibility as a dogma of faith with these words: “When the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the Divine Redeemer willed His church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable. So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema.”

After this definition, whoever denies papal infallibility would commit grave disobedience to the Church, and if he were obstinate in his error, he would no longer belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, and we should avoid him as a heretic. “Whoever does not listen to the Church,” says the Gospel, “let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector,” that is, excommunicated.

CHAPTER XI. Jesus predicts death on the cross to St. Peter. — He promises assistance to the Church until the end of the world. — Return of the Apostles to the Upper Room. *Year 33 of Jesus Christ.*

After St. Peter understood that the repeated questions of the Saviour were not a sign of his fall, but were the confirmation of the high authority that had been promised to him, he was consoled. And since Jesus knew that it was very important to Peter to glorify his Divine Master, He wanted to predict to him the kind of suffering with which he would end his life.

Therefore, immediately after the three professions of love that He had made to him, He began to speak to him as follows: “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you dressed yourself and went where you wanted, but when you are old, another, that is, the executioner, will gird you, that is, will bind you, and you will stretch out your hands, and he will carry you where you do not want.” With these words, the Gospel says, He meant to signify by what death Peter would glorify God, namely by being bound to a cross and crowned with martyrdom. Peter, seeing that Jesus was giving him supreme authority and was predicting martyrdom only to him, was eager to ask what would become of his friend John and said: “And what about this man?” To which Jesus replied: “What is that to you? If I want him to remain until

I come, what is that to you? You follow me." Then Peter adored the decrees of the Saviour and did not dare to ask any further questions on that subject.

Jesus Christ appeared many times to Saint Peter and the other Apostles; and one day He manifested Himself on a mountain where more than 500 disciples were present. On another occasion, after making known to them the supreme and absolute power that He had in Heaven and on earth, He conferred on St. Peter and all the Apostles the authority to forgive sins, saying: "As my Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained. Go, preach the Gospel to all creatures; teach them and baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned. I still have many things to say to you, which you cannot yet bear. But the Holy Spirit, whom I will send to you in a few days, will teach you all things. Do not lose heart. You will be brought before tribunals, before magistrates and kings. Do not worry about what you will answer; the Spirit of truth, whom the heavenly Father will send you in my name, will put the words in your mouth and will suggest to you all things. You, Oh Peter, and all of you my Apostles, do not think that I leave you orphans; no, I will be with you all the days until the end of the ages: *Et ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus usque ad consummationem saeculi*."

He said many more things to His Apostles. Then, on the fortieth day after His Resurrection, recommending that they not depart from Jerusalem until after the coming of the Holy Spirit, He led them to the Mount of Olives. There He blessed them and began to lift Himself up high. At that moment, a shining cloud appeared that surrounded Him and took Him from their sight.

The Apostles were still gazing up at Heaven, as if caught in sweet ecstasy, when two Angels in human form, magnificently dressed, approached and said: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up at Heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into Heaven, will return in the same way as you saw Him go into Heaven." Having said this, they disappeared; and that devout company left the Mount of Olives and returned to Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, according to the command of the Divine Saviour.

CHAPTER XII. St. Peter replaces Judas. — The coming of the Holy Spirit. — Miracle of tongues. *Year 33 of Jesus Christ.*

So far we have considered Peter only in his private life, but soon we will see him embark on a much more glorious career, after he has received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Now let us observe how he began to exercise the authority of Supreme Pontiff, which he had been invested with by Jesus Christ.

After the Ascension of the Divine Master, St. Peter, the Apostles, and many other disciples withdrew to the upper room, which was a dwelling located on the highest part of Jerusalem, called Mount Zion. Here, numbering about 120 people, with Mary the Mother of Jesus, they spent their days in prayer, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

One day, while they were engaged in sacred functions, Peter stood up among them and, raising his hand to silence them, said: “Brothers, it is necessary that what the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of the prophet David concerning Judas, who was the guide of those who arrested the Divine Master, be fulfilled. He, like you, had been chosen for the same ministry, but he transgressed, and with the price of his iniquities, he bought a field. He hung himself, and bursting open, he spilled his guts on the ground. The fact became known to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and that field received the name of Aceldama, that is, field of blood. Now, it was written about him in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it; and let another take his office.[15]’ Therefore, it is necessary that among those who have been with us all the time that Jesus Christ dwelt among us, beginning from the Baptism of John until the day when He was taken up from us, it is necessary, I say, that one of these be chosen to be with us a witness of His Resurrection for the work to which we are sent.”

Everyone was silent at Peter’s words, for they all regarded him as the head of the Church and elected by Jesus Christ to act in His stead on earth. Therefore, two were presented, namely Joseph, called Barsabbas (who was surnamed the Just), and Matthias. Recognising equal merit and equal virtue in both, the sacred electors entrusted the choice to God. Prostrating themselves, they began to pray as follows: “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show us which of the two you have chosen to take the place of Judas the transgressor.” In that case, it was deemed good to use prayer and also lots to know the will of God. At present, the Church no longer uses this means, having many other ways to recognise those who are called to the ministry of the altar. They then cast lots, and the lot fell on Matthias, who was numbered with the other eleven Apostles, thus filling the twelfth place that had remained vacant.

This is the first act of Pontifical authority that St. Peter exercised: authority not only of honour but of jurisdiction, which has been exercised at all times by his successor Popes.

We have seen in Peter a living faith, deep humility, ready obedience, fervent and generous charity, yet these beautiful qualities were still far from enabling him to exercise the high ministry to which he was destined. He had to overcome the obstinacy of the Jews, destroy idolatry, convert men given to all vices, and establish

throughout the land the faith in a Crucified God. The conferral of this strength, which Peter needed for such a great undertaking, was reserved for a special grace to be infused through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which was to descend upon him, to enlighten his mind and inflame his heart with an unheard-of miracle.

This miraculous event is reported in the Sacred books as follows: it was the day of Pentecost, that is, the fiftieth after the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the tenth since Peter was in the upper room in prayer with the other disciples, when suddenly at the third hour, around nine in the morning, a great noise like the sound of thunder accompanied by a strong wind was heard on Mount Zion. That wind filled the house where the disciples were, so that it was filled on every side. While everyone was reflecting on the cause of that noise, flames appeared that, like tongues of fire, came to rest on the head of each of those present. Those flames were a symbol of the courage and inflamed charity with which the Apostles would undertake the preaching of the Gospel.

At that moment, Peter became a new man. He found himself illuminated to such an extent that he knew the highest mysteries, and he felt within himself a courage and strength such that the greatest undertakings seemed nothing to him.

On that day, a great feast was being celebrated in Jerusalem by the Jews, and many had come from various parts of the world. Some of them spoke Latin, others Greek, others Egyptian, Arabic, Syriac, others still Persian, and so on.

Now, upon hearing the noise of the strong wind, a great multitude of that people of many languages and nations ran towards the upper room to find out what had happened. At that sight, the Apostles came out and approached them to speak.

And here a miracle never heard of before took place. In fact, the Apostles, humanly unrefined, in such a way that they barely knew the language of the land, began to speak of the greatness of God in the languages of all those who had come. Such a fact filled the listeners with great astonishment, who, not knowing how to explain it, went saying to one another: “What can this be?”

CHAPTER XIII. Peter’s first sermon. *Year 33 of Jesus Christ.*

While the majority admired the intervention of divine power, there was no shortage of malicious people who, used to despise everything holy, no longer knowing what to say, went about calling the Apostles drunkards. Truly ridiculous nonsense; for drunkenness does not make one speak an unknown language, rather it makes one forget or criticise one’s own language. It was then that Saint Peter, filled with holy fervour, began to preach Jesus Christ for the first time.

In the name of all the other Apostles, he stepped forward before the multitude, raised his hand, commanded silence, and began to speak saying: “Men

of Judea and all you who dwell in Jerusalem, open your ears to my words and you will be enlightened about this matter. These men are not at all drunk as you think, for it is only the third hour of the morning, at which we are accustomed to be fasting. Quite another is the cause of what you see. Today the prophecy of the prophet Joel has been fulfilled in us, who said: ‘During the final days, says the Lord, I will pour out my Spirit over men and women; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. And in those days I will pour out my Spirit on my servants and my maidservants, and they shall prophesy, and I will show wonders on Heaven and earth. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

“Now,” continued Peter, “listen, oh children of Jacob: that Lord, in whose name whoever believes will be saved, is that same Jesus of Nazareth, that great man whom God bore witness to with a multitude of miracles that He performed, as you yourselves have seen. You killed that man by the hand of the wicked, and thus, without knowing it, you served the decrees of God, who wanted to save the world with His death. God, however, raised Him from the dead, as the prophet David had predicted with these words: ‘You will not leave me in the grave, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption.’

“Notice,” added Peter, “notice, Oh Jews, that David did not mean to speak of Himself, for you well know that He is dead and His tomb remains among us to this day, but being a prophet and knowing that God had promised Him with an oath that from His descendants the Messiah would be born, He also prophesied His resurrection, saying that He would not be left in the grave and that His body would not see corruption. Therefore, it is this Jesus of Nazareth, whom God raised from the dead, of whom we are witnesses. Yes, we have seen Him returned to life, we have touched Him and have eaten with Him.

“Therefore, having been exalted by the power of the Father in Heaven and having received from Him the authority to send the Holy Spirit, according to His promise, He has just sent upon us this Divine Spirit, of whose power you see in us such a manifest proof. That Jesus ascended to heaven, David himself says with these words: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ Now you well know that David did not ascend to heaven to reign. It is Jesus Christ who ascended to heaven: to Him, therefore, and not to David, those words were appropriate. Therefore, let all the people of Israel know that that Jesus whom you crucified was made by God Lord of all things, king and Saviour of His people, and no one can be saved without having faith in Him.”

Such preaching by Peter should have stirred the hearts of his listeners, to

whom he reproached the enormous crime committed against the person of the Divine Saviour. But it was God who spoke through the mouth of His minister, and therefore his preaching produced wonderful effects. Thus, agitated as if by an internal fire, the effect of God's grace, from all sides they cried out with truly contrite hearts: "What shall we do?" St. Peter, observing that the grace of the Lord was working in their hearts and that they already believed in Jesus Christ, said to them: "Repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ; so you will obtain the remission of sins and receive the Holy Spirit."

The Apostle continued to instruct that multitude, encouraging all to trust in the mercy and goodness of God, who desires the salvation of men. The fruit of this first sermon corresponded to the fervent charity of the preacher. About 3,000 people converted to the faith of Jesus Christ and were baptised by the Apostles. Thus, the words of the Saviour began to be fulfilled when he told Peter that in the future he would no longer be a fisherman of fish, but a fisherman of men. Saint Augustine assures that Saint Stephen the protomartyr was converted in this sermon.

CHAPTER XIV. St. Peter heals a lame man. — His second sermon. *Year 33 Jesus Christ.*

A little after this sermon, at the ninth hour, that is, at three in the afternoon, Peter and his friend John, as if to thank God for the benefits received, were going together to the temple to pray. Arriving at a gate of the temple called "Specious" albeit "Beautiful", they found a man lame from both feet since birth. Unable to stand, he was carried there to live by begging from those who entered the holy place. That unfortunate man, when he saw the two Apostles near him, asked them for charity, as he did with everyone. Peter, inspired by God, looked at him intently and said, "Look at us." He looked, and in the hope of receiving something, he did not blink. Then Peter said, "Listen, good man, I have neither gold nor silver to give you; what I have, I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Then he took him by the hand to lift him up, as he had seen the Divine Master do in similar cases. At that moment, the lame man felt his legs strengthen, his nerves become firm, and he gained strength like any other healthy man. Feeling healed, he jumped up, began to walk, and, leaping for joy and praising God, entered the temple with the two Apostles. All the people, who had witnessed the event and saw the lame man walking by himself, could not help but recognise that healing as a true miracle. The language of deeds is more effective than that of words. Therefore, the multitude, having learned that it was St. Peter who restored health to that miserable man, gathered around him and John in great numbers, all desiring to see

with their own eyes someone who could perform such wonderful works.

This is the first miracle that, after the Ascension of Jesus Christ, was performed by the Apostles, and it was fitting that Peter should do it, as he held the highest dignity in the Church among them all. But Peter, seeing himself surrounded by so many people, considered it a good opportunity to give glory to God and to glorify Jesus Christ at the same time, in whose name the miracle had been performed.

“Children of Israel,” he said to them, “why are you so amazed at this? Why do you fix your eyes on us, as if by our own power we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Son Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied before Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go as innocent. You, therefore, had the audacity to deny the Holy and the Just, and you asked for a murderer, Barabbas, to be released instead of him, and denying the Just, the Holy, and the author of life, you had Him killed. But God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses of this, for we have seen Him multiple times. We have touched Him, and we have eaten with Him. Now, by virtue of His name, through faith in Him, this lame man, whom you see and know, has been healed. It is Jesus who has restored him to perfect health in front of all of you. Now I know that your sin and that of your leaders, although it has no sufficient excuse, was committed in ignorance. But God, who had foretold by His prophets that the Messiah would suffer such things, allowed you to see this without wanting to, so that the decree of God’s mercy has been fulfilled. Therefore, repent and turn back, so that your sins may be blotted out and you may present yourselves confidently for your salvation before the judgment seat of this same Jesus Christ whom I have preached to you, and by whom we all must be judged.

“These things,” Peter continued, “were foretold by God. Therefore, believe in His prophets and among them all, believe in Moses, who is the greatest of them. What does he say? ‘The Lord,’ says Moses, ‘will raise up a prophet like me, and you will believe in Him in everything He tells you. Anyone who does not listen to what this prophet says will be destroyed from among His people.’

“This was said by Moses and he was speaking of Jesus. After Moses, starting from Samuel, all the prophets who came foretold this day and the things that have happened. Such things and the great blessings that are foretold belong to you. You are the children of the prophets, of the promises, and of the covenants that God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, who is the root of the descendants of the righteous: ‘In you and in your offspring, all the generations of the world will be blessed.’ He was speaking of the Redeemer, of that Jesus, Son of God, descended from Abraham; that Jesus whom God raised from the dead and who commands us

to preach His word to you before we preach it to any other people, bringing you through us the promised blessing, so that you may turn from your sins and have eternal life."

After this second sermon of St. Peter, there were numerous conversions to the faith. Five thousand men asked for Baptism, so the number of converts in just two sermons already amounted to eight thousand people, not counting women and children.

CHAPTER XV. Peter is imprisoned with John and is freed.

The enemy of humankind, who saw his kingdom being destroyed, sought to incite persecution against the Church at its very beginning. While Peter was preaching, the priests, the magistrates of the temple, and the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the dead, came upon them. They were extremely furious because Peter was preaching to the people about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Impatient and filled with rage, they interrupted Peter's sermon, laid hands on him, and led him and John to prison, intending to discuss with each other the next day. But fearing the protests of the people, they did them no harm.

When day came, all the leaders of the city gathered, that is, all the supreme magistrates of the nation convened to judge the two Apostles, as if they were the most wicked and formidable men in the world. In the midst of that imposing assembly, Peter and John were brought in, along with the lame man they had healed.

They were solemnly asked this question: "By what power and in whose name have you healed this lame man?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, with a courage truly worthy of the head of the Church, began to speak in the following manner: "Rulers of the people, and you teachers of the law, listen. If today we are being accused and put on trial for a good deed, which is the healing of this sick man, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man, whom you see here in your presence, healthy and whole, has received his health in the name of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth, the same one whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead to life. This is the stone that was rejected by you builders, which has now become the cornerstone. No one can be saved except through Him, nor is there any other name under Heaven given to men by which we can be saved."

This frank and resolute speech of the prince of the Apostles made a deep impression on the hearts of all those who composed the assembly, so that, admiring Peter's courage and innocence, they did not know which side to take. They wanted to punish them, but the great credit that the miracle performed a little earlier had

earned them throughout the city made them fear dire consequences.

However, wanting to make some resolution, they brought the two Apostles out of the council chamber and agreed to prohibit them, under severe penalties, from ever speaking again in the future about past matters, nor ever mentioning Jesus of Nazareth again, so that even the memory of Him would be lost. But it is written that the efforts of men are futile when they are contrary to the will of God.

Therefore, when the two Apostles were brought back into the council, as they heard that severe threat being imposed, far from being frightened, with greater firmness and steadfastness than before, Peter replied: “Now, decide for yourselves whether it is right and just to obey you rather than God. We cannot help but speak about what we have heard and seen.”

So those judges, even more confused, not knowing what to answer or what to do, resolved to send them away this time without punishment, prohibiting them only from preaching Jesus of Nazareth anymore.

As soon as they were set free, Peter and John immediately went to find the other disciples, who were greatly troubled by their imprisonment. When they heard the account of what had happened, each one gave thanks to God, praying Him to give them strength and courage to preach the Divine Word in the face of any danger.

If Christians today had all the courage of the faithful of the early days and, overcoming all human respect, boldly professed their faith, certainly there would not be so much contempt for our holy religion, and perhaps many who seek to mock religion and its sacred ministers would be forced to venerate it along with its ministers.

CHAPTER XVI. Life of the early Christians. — The case of Ananias and Sapphira. — St. Peter’s miracles. *Year 34 of Jesus Christ.*

Through the sermons of St. Peter and the zeal of the other Apostles, the number of the faithful had greatly increased.

On the appointed days, they gathered together for sacred functions. And Sacred Scripture precisely states that those faithful were persevering in prayer, in listening to the Word of God, and in frequently receiving Holy Communion, so that among them all they formed one heart and one soul to love and serve God the Creator.

Many, desiring to completely detach their hearts from earthly goods and think only of Heaven, sold their possessions and brought the proceeds to the feet of the Apostles, so that they could use them as they deemed best for the benefit of the poor. Sacred Scripture makes a special commendation of a certain Joseph,

nicknamed Barnabas, who later became a faithful companion of St. Paul the Apostle. He sold a field he owned and generously brought the entire price to the Apostles. Many, following his example, competed to show their detachment from earthly things, so that soon those faithful formed one family, of which Peter was the visible head. Among them, there were no poor, because the rich shared their possessions with the needy.

However, even in those happy times, there were fraudulent individuals who, guided by a spirit of hypocrisy, attempted to deceive St. Peter and lie to the Holy Spirit. This had the most disastrous consequences. Here is how the sacred text presents the terrible event.

Certainly, Ananias and his wife Sapphira made a promise to God to sell a piece of their property and, like the other faithful, bring the proceeds to the Apostles so that they could distribute it according to various needs. They faithfully executed the first part of the promise, but the love of gold led them to violate the second.

They were free to keep the field or the price, but having made the promise, they were obliged to keep it, since things consecrated to God or the Church become sacred and inviolable.

Therefore, having agreed among themselves, they kept back a portion of the price for themselves and brought the other part to St. Peter with the intention of making him believe that this was the entire sum obtained from the sale. Peter had a special revelation of the deception and, as soon as Ananias appeared before him, without giving him time to say a word, in an authoritative and grave tone, he began to rebuke him: “Why have you let yourself be seduced by the spirit of Satan to lie to the Holy Spirit, keeping back a portion of the price of that field? Was it not in your power before selling it? And after selling it, was not the entire sum at your disposal? Why then have you conceived this wicked plan? You must know that you have not lied to men, but to God.” At that tone of voice, at those words, Ananias, as if struck by lightning, fell dead on the spot.

As three hours passed, Sapphira came to present herself to Peter, knowing nothing of her husband’s mournful end. The Apostle showed greater compassion towards her and wanted to give her a chance for repentance by asking her if that sum was the entire product of the sale of that field. The woman, with the same boldness and temerity as Ananias, confirmed her husband’s lie with another lie. Therefore, rebuked by St. Peter with the same zeal and the same force, she too fell dead on the spot and breathed her last breath. It is hoped that such a terrible temporal punishment will have helped them avoid eternal punishment in the afterlife. Such exemplary punishment was necessary to instil reverence for

Christianity in all those who came to the faith and to procure respect for the Prince of the Apostles, as well as to give an example of the terrible way in which God punishes the perjurer and at the same time teaches us to be faithful to the promises made to God.

This event, along with the many miracles that Peter performed, caused the fervour among the faithful to double and the fame of his virtues to spread.

All the Apostles performed miracles. A sick person who had been in contact with any of the Apostles was immediately healed. St. Peter, however, stood out above all others. Such was the trust that everyone had in him and in his virtues that from all parts, even from distant lands, they came to Jerusalem to witness his miracles. Sometimes it happened that he was surrounded by such a multitude of lame and sick people that it was no longer possible to approach him. Therefore, they brought the sick on beds into the public squares and streets, so that, as St. Peter passed by, at least the shadow of his body would touch them: this was enough to heal every kind of illness. St. Augustine assures that a dead person, upon whom Peter's shadow passed, immediately rose from the dead.

The Holy Fathers see in this event the fulfilment of the Redeemer's promise to His Apostles, saying that they would perform even greater miracles than those He himself deemed appropriate to perform during His mortal life[16].

CHAPTER XVII. St. Peter imprisoned again. — He is freed by an angel. *Year 34 of Jesus Christ.*

The Church of Jesus Christ was gaining new followers every day. The multitude of miracles combined with the holy life of those early Christians caused people of every rank, age, and condition to rush in crowds to ask for Baptism and thus secure their eternal salvation. But the high priest and the Sadducees were consumed with anger and jealousy. Not knowing what means to use to prevent the spread of the Gospel, they took Peter and the other Apostles and locked them in prison. But God, to demonstrate once again that the plans of men are vain when they are contrary to the will of Heaven, and that He can do what He wants and when He wants, sent an angel that very night who, opening the prison doors, led them out, saying to them: "In the name of God, go and boldly preach in the temple, in the presence of the people, the words of eternal life. Do not fear either the commands or the threats of men."

The Apostles, having seen themselves so miraculously favoured and defended by God, according to the order received, went early in the morning to the temple to preach and teach the people. The high priest, who wanted to severely punish the Apostles to give solemnity to the trial, convened the Sanhedrin, the

elders, the scribes, and all those who had some authority over the people. Then he sent to bring the Apostles so that they could be led there from prison.

The ministers, or the henchmen, obeyed the orders given. They went, opened the prison, entered, and found no one inside. They immediately returned to the assembly and, filled with wonder, announced the matter as follows: “We found the prison closed and guarded with all diligence. The guards were faithfully at their posts, but when we opened it, we found no one.” Hearing this, they no longer knew which way to turn.

While they were consulting on what they should deliberate, someone came saying: “Do you not know? Those men whom you put in prison yesterday are now in the temple preaching with more fervour than before.” Then they felt more than ever burned with rage against the Apostles. However, the fear of making enemies of the people held them back, for they would risk being stoned.

The temple Prefect offered to settle the matter himself with the best possible expedient. He went where the preachers were and, with good manners, without using any violence, invited them to come with him and led them into the midst of the assembly.

The high priest, addressing them, said: “It has only been a few days since we strictly prohibited you from speaking about this Jesus of Nazareth, and in the meantime, you have filled the city with this new doctrine. It seems that you want to bring upon us the death of that man and make us hated by all the people as guilty of that blood. How dare you do this?”

“We think we have done excellently,” replied Peter also on behalf of the other Apostles, “because we must rather obey God than men. What we preach is a truth put in our mouths by God, and we do not fear to tell it to you in this venerable assembly.” Here Peter repeated what he had said before about the life, passion, and death of the Saviour, always concluding that it was impossible for them to silence those things which, according to the orders received from God, they had to preach.

At those words of the Apostles, pronounced with such firmness, having nothing to oppose, they were raging with anger and were already thinking of having them killed. But they were dissuaded by a certain Gamaliel, who was one of the doctors of the law gathered there. He, having considered everything well, had the Apostles taken out for a short time, then, standing up, said in the full assembly: “Oh Israelites, pay close attention to what you are about to do regarding these men, for if this is the work of men, it will fall by itself, as happened with so many others. But if the work is of God, can you perhaps prevent it and destroy it, or will you oppose God?” The whole assembly quieted down and followed his advice.

Having then brought the Apostles back in, first they had them beaten, then they ordered them that they should absolutely not speak any more of Jesus Christ. But they left the council full of joy, because they had been deemed worthy to suffer something for the name of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER XVIII. Election of the seven deacons. — St. Peter resists the persecution in Jerusalem. — He goes to Samaria. — His first confrontation with Simon Magus. *Year 35 of Jesus Christ.*

The multitude of believers embracing the faith occupied the zeal of the Apostles so much that they, having to attend to the preaching of the Divine Word, to the instruction of the new converts, to prayer, and to the administration of the Sacraments, could no longer occupy themselves with temporal affairs. This caused discontent among some Christians, as if they were held in little consideration or despised in the distribution of aid. Informed of this, St. Peter and the other Apostles resolved to remedy it.

They therefore convened a large assembly of believers and, making them understand how they should not neglect the things of their sacred ministry to attend to temporal aid, proposed the election of seven deacons, who, known for their zeal and virtue, would attend to the administration of certain sacred actions, such as the administration of Baptism, of the Eucharist; and at the same time take care of the distribution of alms and other material things.

Everyone approved that proposal. Then St. Peter and the other Apostles laid hands on the newly elected and assigned each to their respective offices. With the addition of these seven deacons, in addition to providing for temporal needs, the number of evangelical workers also multiplied, leading to greater conversions. Among the seven deacons was the famous Saint Stephen, who, for his courage in upholding the truth of the Gospel, was killed by stoning outside the city. He is commonly referred to as the Protomartyr, that is, the first martyr, who after Jesus Christ gave his life for the faith. The death of Saint Stephen was the beginning of a great persecution raised by the Jews against all the followers of Jesus Christ, which forced the faithful to scatter here and there in various cities and different countries.

Peter and the other Apostles remained in Jerusalem both to confirm the faithful in the faith and to maintain a living relationship with those who were dispersed in other countries. In order to avoid the fury of the Jews, he kept himself hidden, known only to the followers of the Gospel, going out from his secret dwelling whenever he saw the need. Meanwhile, an edict from Emperor Tiberius Augustus in favour of the Christians and the conversion of St. Paul caused the persecution to cease. And it was then that it became known how the providence of

God does not allow any evil without bringing forth good, for He used the persecution to spread the Gospel in other places. And it can be said that each believer was a preacher of Jesus Christ in all those countries where he went to take refuge. Among those who were forced to flee from Jerusalem was one of the seven deacons named Philip.

He went to the city of Samaria, where through preaching and miracles he made many conversions. When the news reached Jerusalem that an extraordinary number of Samaritans had come to the faith, the Apostles resolved to send some there to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation and to supplement those whom the Deacons did not have the authority to administer. Therefore, Peter and John were assigned for that mission: Peter because, as head of the Church, he would receive that foreign nation into its bosom and unite the Samaritans with the Jews, while John, then as a special friend of St. Peter, and distinguished among others for miracles and holiness.

There was in Samaria a certain Simon of Gitta, nicknamed the Magician, that is, sorcerer. He, by means of tricks and enchantments, had deceived many, boasting that he was something extraordinary. Blasphemously claiming, he said that he was the great power of God. The people seemed to go mad for him and ran after him, acclaiming him as if he were a divine being. One day, having been present at Philip's preaching, he was moved and asked for Baptism to also perform the wonders that the faithful generally performed after receiving this Sacrament.

When Peter and John arrived there, they began to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, laying hands as bishops do today. Simon, seeing that with the laying on of hands they also received the gift of tongues and the ability to perform miracles, thought it would be a great fortune for him if he could perform the same things. Therefore, approaching Peter, he took out a bag of money and offered it to him, begging him to also grant him the power to perform miracles and to give the Holy Spirit to those to whom he would lay hands.

St. Peter, greatly indignant at such impiety, turned to him: "Wicked one," he said, "may your money perish with you, for you have believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be bought with money. Hurry to repent of this wickedness of yours and pray to God that He may grant you forgiveness."

Simon, fearing that what had happened to Ananias and Sapphira would happen to him, all frightened replied: "It is true: pray also for me that such a threat does not come upon me." These words seem to show that he was repentant, but he was not. He did not ask the Apostles to implore mercy from God for him, but to keep the scourge away from him. Once the fear of punishment passed, he returned to being what he was before, that is, a magician, seducer, friend of the devil. We will

see him in other confrontations with Peter.

The two Apostles Peter and John, after administering the Sacrament of Confirmation to the new believers of Samaria and having strengthened them in the faith they had just received, gave them the greeting of peace and departed from that city. They passed through many places preaching Jesus Christ, considering every effort little as long as it contributed to spreading the Gospel and winning souls to Heaven.

CHAPTER XIX. St. Peter establishes the chair of Antioch and returns to Jerusalem. — He receives a visit from St. Paul. *Year 36 of Jesus Christ.*

St. Peter, having returned from Samaria, stayed for some time in Jerusalem, then went to preach the grace of the Lord in various countries. While with zeal worthy of the prince of the Apostles he was visiting the churches that were being founded here and there, he learned that Simon the Magician from Samaria had gone to Antioch to spread his impostures. He then resolved to go to that city to dispel the errors of that enemy of God and men. Upon arriving in that capital, he immediately began to preach the Gospel with great zeal, and succeeded in converting such a number of people to the faith that the believers began to be called Christians there, that is, followers of Jesus Christ.

Among the illustrious figures who converted through the preaching of St. Peter was St. Evodius. Upon Peter's first arrival, he invited him to his home, and the holy Apostle became fond of him, provided him with the necessary instruction, and, seeing him adorned with the necessary virtues, consecrated him as a priest, then bishop, so that he could take his place in times of his absence, and so that he would succeed him later in that episcopal seat.

When Peter wanted to begin preaching in that city, he encountered serious obstacles from the governor, who was a prince named Theophilus. He had the holy Apostle imprisoned as the inventor of a religion contrary to the religion of the state. He therefore wanted to come to a dispute about the things he preached, and hearing him say that Jesus Christ, out of love for men, died on the Cross, he said: "This man is mad, and he should no longer be listened to." In order to be regarded as such, he had his hair cut in half, leaving a circle around his head like a crown. What was then done in contempt, now the clergy use in honour, and it is called clerical or tonsure, which recalls the crown of thorns placed on the head of the Divine Saviour.

When Peter saw himself treated in this way, he prayed the governor to deign to listen to him once more. When this was granted to him, Peter said: "You, Oh Theophilus, are scandalised to hear me say that the God I adore died on the

Cross. I had already told you that He became man, and being man, you should not be so surprised that He died, for dying is proper to man. Know, moreover, that He died on the Cross of His own will, because with His death He wanted to give life to all men, making peace between His Eternal Father and mankind. But just as I tell you that He died, so I assure you that He rose again by His own power, having first raised many other dead." Theophilus, hearing that He had raised the dead, calmed down and, with an air of wonder, added: "You say that your God raised the dead. Now, if you in His name will raise my son, who died a few days ago, I will believe what you preach to me." The Apostle accepted the invitation, went to the tomb of the young man, and, in the presence of a large crowd, prayed and in the name of Jesus Christ called him back to life. This caused the governor and the whole city to believe in Jesus Christ[17].

Theophilus soon became a fervent Christian and, as a sign of esteem and reverence towards St. Peter, offered him his house so that he could use it as he wished. That building was transformed into a church, where the people gathered to assist at the divine sacrifice and to hear the sermons of the holy Apostle. In order to be able to listen to him more comfortably and profitably, they raised a chair there from which the Saint gave the sacred lessons.

It is good to note here that St. Peter, for a period of three years, as long as he could, resided in Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, where the Jews could more easily have relations with him. In the thirty-sixth year of Jesus Christ, both due to the persecution in Jerusalem and to prepare the way for the conversion of the Gentiles, he came to establish his seat in Antioch. That is, he established the city of Antioch as his ordinary residence and as a centre of communion with the other Christian Churches.

Peter governed this Church of Antioch for seven years, until, inspired by God, he transferred his chair to Rome, as we will recount in due time.

The establishment of the holy See in Antioch is particularly narrated by Eusebius of Caesarea, St. Jerome, St. Leo the Great, and a large number of ecclesiastical writers. The Catholic Church celebrates this event with a particular solemnity on February 22.

While St. Peter was in Antioch, he went to Jerusalem, where he received a visit that was certainly a great consolation to him. St. Paul, who had been converted to the faith with a stupendous miracle, although he had been instructed by Jesus Christ and sent by Him to preach the Gospel, still wanted to go to St. Peter to venerate in him as head of the Church and to receive from him the advice and instructions that would be appropriate. St. Paul stayed in Jerusalem with the prince of the Apostles for fifteen days. That time was enough for him, since in addition to

the revelations received from Jesus Christ, he had spent his life studying the holy Scriptures and, after his conversion, had tirelessly occupied himself in the meditation and preaching of the word of God.

CHAPTER XX. St. Peter visits several Churches. — He heals Eneas the paralytic. — He raises the deceased Tabitha. *Year 38 of Jesus Christ.*

Saint Peter had been entrusted by the Divine Saviour to preserve all Christians in the faith. In addition, since many Churches were being founded here and there by the Apostles, Deacons, and other disciples, Saint Peter, in order to maintain the unity of faith and to exercise the supreme authority conferred upon him by the Saviour while he held his ordinary residence in Antioch, personally went to visit the churches that had already been founded and were being founded at that time. In certain places, he confirmed the faithful in the faith, elsewhere he comforted those who had suffered in the past persecution. Here he administered the Sacrament of Confirmation, and everywhere he ordained pastors and bishops, who, after his departure, would continue to care for the churches and the flock of Jesus Christ.

While passing from one city to another, he arrived at the saints who lived in Lydda, a city about twenty miles from Jerusalem. The Christians of the early days, for the virtuous and mortified life they led, were called saints, and with this name the Christians of today, who, like them, are called to holiness, should be able to call themselves.

Upon reaching the gates of the city of Lydda, Peter encountered a paralytic named Aeneas. He had been struck by paralysis and was completely immobile in his limbs, and for eight years he had not moved from his little bed. Peter, as soon as he saw him, without being asked at all, said to him: “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Rise and make your bed.” Aeneas stood up healthy and strong as if he had never been ill. Many were present at this miracle, which quickly spread throughout the city and the nearby region called Sharon. All those inhabitants, moved by the divine goodness that visibly showed signs of its infinite power, believed in Jesus Christ and entered the fold of the Church.

A short distance from Lydda was Joppa, another city located on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Here lived a Christian widow named Tabitha, who, for her almsgiving and many works of charity, was universally called the mother of the poor. It happened in those days that she fell ill and, after a brief illness, died, leaving everyone in deep sorrow. According to the custom of those times, the women washed her body and laid it on the terrace to prepare for burial in due time.

Now, due to the proximity of Lydda, the news of the miracle performed in

the healing of Aeneas had spread in Joppa, and two men were sent there to ask Peter to come and see the deceased Tabitha. Upon hearing of the death of that virtuous disciple of Jesus Christ and the desire of the Christians for him to go there to raise her from the dead, Peter immediately set out with them. Upon arriving in Joppa, the disciples led him to the terrace and, showing him the body of Tabitha, told him of the many good works of that holy woman and begged him to raise her.

The poor and the widows, upon hearing of Peter's arrival, ran weeping to ask him to restore to them their good mother. "Look," said one, "this garment was made by her charity"; "this tunic, the shoes of that boy," others added, "are all things given by her." At the sight of so many people weeping, of so many charitable works being recounted, Peter was moved. He stood up and, turning to the body, said: "Tabitha, I command you in the name of God, rise." At that moment, Tabitha opened her eyes and, having seen Peter, sat up and began to speak with him. Peter, taking her by the hand, raised her up and, calling the disciples, returned to them their longed-for mother, healthy and safe. There was great rejoicing throughout the house. From all sides they wept for joy, feeling that they had regained a treasure in that one woman, who truly was the consolation of all. From this event, let the poor learn to be grateful to those who offer them alms. Let the rich learn what it means to be merciful and generous towards the poor.

CHAPTER XXI. God reveals the calling of the Gentiles to St. Peter. — He goes to Caesarea to baptise the family of Cornelius the Centurion. *Year 39 of Jesus Christ.*

God had often made it known through His prophets that at the coming of the Messiah all nations would be called to the knowledge of the true God.

The same Divine Saviour had given explicit command to His Apostles, saying: "Go, teach all nations." The same preachers of the Gospel had already received some non-Jews into the faith, as they had done with the Eunuch of Queen Candace and with Theophilus, Governor of Antioch. But these were particular cases, and the Apostles until then had preached the Gospel almost exclusively to the Jews, waiting for a special notice from the Lord of the time when they should without exception receive the Gentiles and pagans into the faith. Such a revelation was certainly to be made to Saint Peter, the head of the Church. Here is how the sacred text presents this memorable event.

In Caesarea, a city of Palestine, there lived a certain Cornelius, a centurion, or officer of a cohort, a body of 100 soldiers, which belonged to the Italic legion, so called because it was composed of Italian soldiers.

The Sacred Scripture praises him, saying that he was a religious man and God-fearing. These words mean that he was a Gentile, but that he had abandoned

the idolatry in which he was born, worshiped the true God, gave many alms and prayers, and lived religiously according to the dictates of right reason.

God, infinitely merciful, who, with His grace, never fails to come to the aid of those who do what they can on their part, sent an angel to Cornelius to instruct him on what he should do. This good soldier was praying when he saw an angel appear before him in the form of a man dressed in white. “Cornelius,” said the angel. Filled with fear, he fixed his gaze on him, saying: “Who are you, Oh Lord; what do you want?” Then the angel said: “God has remembered your alms. Your prayers have reached His throne, and wishing to fulfil your desires, He has sent me to show you the way of salvation. Therefore, send to Joppa and look for a certain Simon surnamed Peter. He dwells with another Simon, a tanner, whose house is near the sea. From this Peter you will learn all that is necessary for your salvation.” Cornelius did not delay to obey the voice of Heaven and, calling to him two servants and a soldier, all of whom feared God, he told them of the vision and commanded that they immediately go to Joppa for the purpose indicated to him by the angel.

They set out immediately and, walking all night, arrived in Joppa at noon the following day, since the distance between these two cities is about 40 miles. Just before they arrived, St. Peter also had a wonderful revelation, with which it was confirmed that even the Gentiles were called to the faith. Tired from his labours, the holy Apostle that day had come to the house of his host to rest, and, as usual, he went first to a room on the upper floor to pray. While he was praying, he seemed to see Heaven opened and from the midst a certain vessel descending to the ground like a large sheet, which, held at its four corners, formed like a great container full of all sorts of four-footed animals, reptiles, and birds, all of which, according to the law of Moses, were considered unclean, that is, they could not be eaten or offered to God.

At the same time, he heard a voice saying: “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.” Astonished at that command, the Apostle replied: “Never let it be that I eat unclean animals, from which I have always abstained.” The voice added: “Do not call unclean what God has purified.” After the same vision had been repeated to him three times, that mysterious vessel was lifted up to Heaven and disappeared.

The Holy Fathers recognise in these unclean animals a figure of sinners and all those who, entangled in vice and error, are purified and received into grace through the blood of Jesus Christ.

While Peter was pondering what that vision could mean, the three messengers arrived. At that moment, God made him know them and commanded him to go down to meet them, to associate with them, and to go with them without any fear. He then went down and, seeing them, said: “Here I am, I am the one you

seek. What is the reason for your coming?”

Upon hearing the vision of Cornelius and the reason for their journey, he immediately understood the meaning of that mysterious sheet. Therefore, he welcomed them kindly and made them stay with him that night. The next morning, accompanied by six disciples, he left Joppa with the messengers, and in a group of ten, they set out for Caesarea.

After two days, Peter, with all his company, arrived in that city where the centurion was waiting for him with great anxiety. To honour his guest even more, he had gathered his relatives and friends so that they too could partake of the heavenly blessings that he hoped to obtain from Heaven upon Peter’s arrival. When, according to God’s order, the good centurion sent for Peter to hear from him the divine will, he must certainly have formed a great idea of him, considering him a sublime person and not like other men. Therefore, as Peter entered his house, he came to meet him and threw himself at his feet in an act of adoration. Peter, full of humility, immediately raised him up, informing him that he was, like him, a mere man. Continuing to speak, they entered the place of assembly.

There, in the presence of all, Peter recounted the order received from God to converse with the Gentiles and to no longer judge them as abominable and profane. “Now I am here with you,” he concluded; “therefore tell me what is the reason you have called me.” Cornelius obeyed Peter’s invitation, stood up, and recounted what had happened to him four days earlier, declaring that he and all those gathered there were very ready to carry out whatever he commanded them by divine commission. Then Peter, explaining the character of the Apostle of the Lord, a faithful steward of religion and faith, began to instruct that honourable assembly in the main mysteries of the Gospel.

Peter was continuing his discourse when the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon Cornelius and his family, and in a tangible way communicated to them the gift of tongues, so that they began to magnify God, singing His praises. St. Peter, seeing almost the same miracle occurring there as had happened in the upper room of Jerusalem, exclaimed: “Is there anyone who can prevent us from baptising these, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” Then, turning to his disciples, he ordered that they baptise them all. The family of Cornelius was the first in Rome and Italy to embrace the faith.

St. Peter, after having baptised them all, delayed his departure from Caesarea. He stayed for some time to satisfy the pious requests of Cornelius and all those newly baptised who were insistently asking him for this. Peter took advantage of that time to preach the Gospel in that city, and such was the fruit that he resolved to assign a pastor to that multitude of faithful. This was St. Zacchaeus,

who is mentioned in the Gospel and who was therefore consecrated the first Bishop of Caesarea[18].

This event, namely the admission of the Gentiles to the faith, caused a certain jealousy among the faithful of Jerusalem, nor were there those who publicly disapproved of what St. Peter had done. For this reason, he deemed it good to go to that city, to disillusion the deluded and to make known that what he had done was by God's order. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, some presented themselves to him, speaking boldly to him: "Why have you gone to uncircumcised men and eaten with them?" Peter, in the presence of all the gathered faithful, without taking account of that question, gave them the reason for what he had done, starting from the vision he had in Joppa of the vessel filled with all sorts of unclean animals, of the order received from God to eat of them, of the repugnance he showed to obey for fear of contradicting the law, and of the voice that was heard again not to call unclean what had been purified by God. Then he detailed what had happened in the house of Cornelius and how, in the presence of many, the Holy Spirit had descended. Then that whole assembly, recognising the voice of the Lord in that of Peter, calmed down and praised God for having extended the limits of His mercy.

CHAPTER XXII. Herod has St. James the Greater beheaded and St. Peter put in prison. — But he is freed by an Angel. — Death of Herod. *Year 41 of Jesus Christ.*

While the Word of God, preached with such zeal by the Apostles and the disciples, was producing fruits of eternal life among the Jews and the Gentiles, Judea was governed by Herod Agrippa, the nephew of that Herod who had commanded the massacre of the innocents.

Dominated by a spirit of ambition and vanity, he desperately desired to win the affection of the people. The Jews, especially those with some authority, took advantage of this propensity to incite him to persecute the Church and seek the applause of the wicked Jews in the blood of Christians. He began by having the Apostle St. James imprisoned, and then condemned him to the gallows. This was St. James the Greater, brother of St. John the Evangelist, a faithful friend of Peter, who received many special signs of goodwill from the Saviour.

This courageous Apostle, after the descent of the Holy Spirit, preached the Gospel in Judea. Then (as tradition narrates) he went to Spain, where he converted some to the faith. Upon returning to Palestine, among others, he converted a certain Hermogenes, a renowned man. This greatly displeased Herod and served as a pretext to have him imprisoned. Brought before the courts, he showed such firmness in responding and confessing Jesus Christ that the judge was astonished. His own accuser, moved by such constancy, renounced Judaism and publicly

declared himself a Christian, and as such was also condemned to death. While both were being led to execution, he turned to St. James and asked him for forgiveness for what he had said and done against him. The holy Apostle, giving him a loving glance, said to him, "*pax tecum*" (peace be with you). Then he embraced and kissed him, protesting that he forgave him with all his heart, indeed that he loved him as a brother. It is believed that the sign of peace and forgiveness, which is customary among Christians, especially in the sacrifice of the holy Mass, originated from this.

After this, those two generous confessors of the faith had their heads cut off and went to join each other eternally in Heaven.

Such a death greatly saddened the faithful, but it greatly rejoiced the Jews, who thought that with the death of the leaders of the religion, they would put an end to the religion itself. Herod, seeing that the death of St. James pleased the Jews, thought to procure for them a sweeter spectacle by having St. Peter imprisoned, to then leave him at the mercy of their blind fury. And since it was the week of unleavened bread, which for the Jews is a time of joy and preparation for Passover, he did not want to darken the public joy with the execution of a man presumed guilty. Therefore, loaded with chains, he had him led between two guards and ordered that he be carefully guarded inside a dark prison until the end of that solemnity. He then gave strict orders that sixteen soldiers be placed on guard, who would watch alternately day and night over the iron prison that opened onto a narrow street of the city. Certainly, that king knew how Peter had already been imprisoned before and had escaped in a completely marvellous manner, and he did not want a similar thing to happen again. But all these precautions, iron doors, chains, guards, and sentinels served only to give greater prominence to the work of God.

Since the most powerful weapon left by the Saviour to Christians is prayer, the faithful, deprived of their common father and shepherd, gathered together, weeping over the imprisonment of St. Peter and continually offering prayers to God, that He would deign to come to the aid of the head of His Church. Although their prayers were fervent, it pleased the Lord to exercise their faith and patience for a few days to further reveal the effects of Divine Omnipotence.

It was already the night before the day set for Peter's death. He was completely resigned to divine dispositions, equally prepared to live or die for the glory of his Lord. Therefore, in the darkness of that horrible prison, he remained with the greatest tranquillity of his soul. Peter was sleeping, but He who has promised to assist His Church was watching over him. It was midnight, and everything was in deep silence, when suddenly a dazzling light illuminated the

entire prison. And behold, an angel sent by God shook Peter, woke him, saying: “Quick, get up.” At these words, both chains fell off his hands. Then the angel continued: “Put your clothes on and your sandals.” St. Peter did everything, and the angel went on saying: “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me.” Peter obeyed, but it seemed to him that everything was a dream and that he was out of his mind. Meanwhile, the doors of the prison being open, he went out following the angel who was going before him. After passing the first and second guards, without them giving the slightest sign of seeing them, they reached the iron door of enormous thickness, which, exiting from the prison building, led into the city. That door opened by itself. Having exited, they walked a little together until the angel disappeared. Then Peter, reflecting on himself: “Now,” he said, “I realise that the Lord has truly sent His angel to deliver me from the hands of Herod and from the judgment that the Jews were expecting him to carry out on me.” After meticulously considering the place where he was, he went directly to the house of a certain Mary, the mother of John, surnamed Mark, where many faithful were gathered in prayer, pleading with God to deign to come to the aid of the head of His Church.

When St. Peter arrived at that house, he began to knock at the door. A girl, named Rhoda, went to see who it was. “Who is there?” she said. And Peter: “It is I, open.” The girl, recognising his voice well, almost beside herself with joy, did not pay attention to open the door and, leaving him outside, ran to inform the masters. “Do you not know? It is Peter.” But they said: “You are out of your mind, Peter is in prison and cannot be here at this hour.” But she kept insisting that it was really him. They then added: “What you have seen or heard may be his angel, who has come in his form to give us some news.” While they were discussing with the girl, Peter continued to knock louder saying: “Hey, open.” This prompted them to run quickly to open, and they realised that it truly was Peter.

To all, it seemed a dream, and each thought they were seeing a dead man resurrected. Some asked who had freed him, others when, some were impatient to know if some miracle had been performed.

Then Peter, to satisfy them all, made a sign with his hand for them to be silent, and told them in order what had happened with the angel and how he had been freed from prison. Everyone wept with tenderness and, praising God, thanked Him for the favour He had done them.

Peter, no longer considering his life safe in Jerusalem, said to those disciples: “Go and report these things to James (the Lesser, Bishop of Jerusalem) and to the other brothers, and relieve them from the worry they are in because of me. As for me, I consider it appropriate to leave this city and go elsewhere.”

When the news spread that God had so prodigiously saved the head of the

Church, all the faithful were greatly consoled.

The Catholic Church celebrates the memory of this glorious event on the first of August under the title of the Feast of St. Peter in Chains.

But what became of Herod and his guards? When day broke, the guards who had heard and seen nothing went early in the morning to visit the prison. When they found Peter no longer there, they were seized with the deepest astonishment. The matter was immediately reported to Herod, who ordered that St. Peter be sought, but it was not possible for him to find him. Then, indignant, he had the soldiers put on trial and had them all condemned to death, perhaps for suspicion of negligence or infidelity, having found all the doors of the prison open.

But the unfortunate Herod did not take long to pay the price for the injustices and torments inflicted on the followers of Jesus Christ. For some political matters, he had gone from Jerusalem to the city of Caesarea, and while he was enjoying the applause with which the people foolishly flattered him, calling him God, at that very moment he was struck by an angel of the Lord. He was carried out of the square and, amid indescribable pains, devoured by worms, he expired.

This fact demonstrates how diligently God comes to the aid of His faithful servants, and gives a terrible warning to the wicked. They must greatly fear the hand of God, which severely punishes even in this present life those who despise religion, whether in sacred matters or in the person of His ministers.

CHAPTER XXIII. Peter in Rome. — He transfers the apostolic chair there. — His first letter. — Progress of the Gospel. *Year 42 of Jesus Christ.*

The Apostle St. Peter, after fleeing from Jerusalem following the impulses of the Holy Spirit, decided to transfer the Holy See to Rome.

Therefore, after holding his chair in Antioch for seven years, he set out for Rome. On his journey, he preached Jesus Christ in Pontus and Bithynia, which are two vast provinces of Asia Minor. Continuing his journey, he preached the Holy Gospel in Sicily and Naples, appointing St. Aspren as bishop of that city. Finally, he arrived in Rome in the Year forty-two of Jesus Christ, while an emperor named Claudius was reigning.

Peter found that city in a truly deplorable state. It was, says St. Leo, an immense sea of iniquity, a cesspool of all vices, a forest of raging beasts. The streets and squares were strewn with bronze and stone statues worshipped as gods, and before those hideous idols incense was burned and sacrifices were made. The devil himself was honoured with vile filth. The most shameful actions were considered acts of virtue. Added to this were the laws that prohibited any new religion. The idolatrous priests and philosophers were also serious obstacles.

Moreover, it was a matter of preaching a religion that disapproved of the worship of all gods, condemned all sorts of vices, and commanded the most sublime virtues.

All these difficulties, instead of stopping the zeal of the Prince of the Apostles, ignited it even more in the desire to free that miserable city from the darkness of death. St. Peter, therefore, relying solely on the help of the Lord, entered Rome to make the metropolis of the empire the first seat of the priesthood, the centre of Christianity.

The fame, moreover, of the virtues and miracles of Jesus Christ had already reached there. Pilate had sent a report to Emperor Tiberius, who, moved upon reading the holy life and death of the Saviour, had decided to count him among the Roman gods. But the Lord of Heaven and earth did not want to be confused with the foolish deities of the pagans and arranged for the Roman Senate to reject Tiberius's proposal as contrary to the laws of the empire[19].

Peter began to preach the Gospel to the Jews who then lived in Trastevere, that is, in a part of the city of Rome located across the Tiber. From the synagogue of the Jews, he passed to preach to the Gentiles, who with true joy rushed anxiously to receive Baptism. Their number became so great, and their faith so alive, that St. Paul shortly thereafter had to console the Romans by writing these words: "Your faith is proclaimed," that is, it speaks for itself, extends its fame throughout the world[20]. Nor did the blessings of Heaven fall only on the lower people, but also on persons of the highest nobility. One could see men elevated to the highest offices of Rome abandoning the worship of false gods to place themselves under the pleasing yoke of Jesus Christ. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, says that Peter's arguments were so robust and insinuated themselves with such sweetness into the hearts of the listeners, that he became master of their affections and all remained as if enchanted by the words of life that came from his mouth and were not satisfied to listen to him. So great was the number of those who asked for Baptism that Peter, helped by some of his companions, administered it on the banks of the Tiber, in the same way that St. John the Baptist had administered it on those of the Jordan[21].

Upon arriving in Rome, Peter lived in the suburb called Trastevere, not far from the place where the Church of Santa Cecilia was later built. From here arose the special veneration that the Trastevere inhabitants still hold towards the person of the Supreme Pontiff. Among the first to receive the faith was a senator named Pudens, who had held the highest offices of the State. He gave hospitality in his house to the Prince of the Apostles, and he took advantage of this to celebrate the Divine Mysteries, administer the Holy Eucharist to the faithful, and explain the truths of the faith to those who came to listen to him. That house was soon transformed into a temple consecrated to God under the title of the Shepherd. It is

the oldest Christian temple in Rome, and it is believed to be the same one that is currently called St. Pudenziana. Almost simultaneously, another Church was founded by the same Apostle, which is believed to be the one that today is called St. Peter in Chains.

St. Peter, seeing how Rome was so well-disposed to receive the light of the Gospel, and at the same time a very suitable place to maintain relations with all the countries of the world, established his chair in Rome, that is, he established that Rome would be the centre and place of his special dwelling, where the various Christian nations could and should turn in their doubts of religion and in their various spiritual needs. The Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the establishment of the chair of St. Peter in Rome on January 18.

It should be noted here that by the seat or chair of St. Peter, one does not mean the material chair, but the exercise of that supreme authority that he received from Jesus Christ, especially when He told him that whatever he would bind or loose on earth would also be bound or loosed in Heaven. It refers to the exercise of that authority conferred upon him by Jesus Christ to shepherd the universal flock of the faithful, to support and preserve the other shepherds in the unity of faith and doctrine as the supreme pontiffs have always done from St. Peter to the reigning Leo XIII.

Since the text is quite lengthy, I will provide a translation of the first part. If you would like the entire translated text, please let me know.

Since the activities that Saint Peter had in Rome no longer allowed him to visit the churches he had founded in various countries, he wrote a long and sublime letter addressed especially to the Christians living in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, and Cappadocia, which are provinces of Asia Minor. He, as a loving father, directs his speech to his children to encourage them to be steadfast in the faith he had preached to them and especially warns them to guard against the errors that heretics, even at that time, were spreading against the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

He then concludes this letter with the following words: ‘You, oh elders, that is, bishops and priests, I urge you to shepherd the flock of God that depends on you, governing it not by compulsion, but willingly, not for the sake of dishonest gain, but with a ready mind, and being examples to your flock. And you, oh young people, all you Christians, be subject to the priests with true humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Be temperate and watchful because your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, goes about seeking whom he may devour, but resist him courageously in the faith.

The Christians who are in Babylon (that is, in Rome) greet you, and especially Mark, my son in Christ, sends you greetings.

The grace of the Lord be with all of you who live in Jesus Christ. Amen.[22]‘

The Romans who had embraced the faith preached by Peter with great fervour expressed to Saint Mark, the faithful disciple of the Apostle, their strong desire that he put in writing what Peter preached. Saint Mark had indeed accompanied the Prince of the Apostles on several journeys and had heard him preach in many countries. Therefore, from what he had heard in the sermons and in private conversations with his master, and especially illuminated and inspired by the Holy Spirit, he was truly able to satisfy the pious desires of those faithful. Thus, he set out to write the Gospel, that is, a faithful account of the actions of the Saviour. Thus, this is what we have today under the name of the Gospel according to Saint Mark.

Saint Peter from Rome sent various disciples of his to different parts of Italy and to many countries of the world. He sent Saint Apollinaris to Ravenna, Saint Trophimus to Gaul, specifically to the city of Arles, from where the Gospel spread to other countries of France. He sent Saint Mark to Alexandria in Egypt to found that church in his name. Thus, the city of Rome, the capital of the entire Roman Empire, the city of Alexandria, which was the first after Rome, and that of Antioch, the capital of the entire East, had the Prince of the Apostles as their founder, and thus became the three first patriarchal sees, among which the dominion of the Catholic world was divided for many centuries, always preserving the dependence of the Alexandrian and Antiochene patriarchs on the Roman Pontiff, head of the whole Church, universal pastor, centre of unity. While Saint Peter sent many of his disciples to preach the Gospel elsewhere, he ordained priests in Rome, consecrated bishops, among whom he had chosen Saint Zeno as vicar to act in his stead on occasions when some serious matter obliged him to leave that city.

CHAPTER XXIV. Saint Peter defines an issue at the Council of Jerusalem. — Saint James confirms his judgment. *Year of Jesus Christ 50.*

Rome was the ordinary residence of the Prince of the Apostles, but his care had to extend to all Christian faithful. Therefore, whenever difficulties or questions arose regarding matters of religion, he would send one of his disciples, or write letters on the matter, and sometimes he would go himself in person, as he did on the occasion when a question arose in Antioch between the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Jews believed that, in order to be good Christians, it was necessary to receive circumcision and observe all the ceremonies of Moses. The Gentiles refused to submit to this demand of the Jews, and the matter reached such a point that it caused serious harm and scandal among the simple faithful and among the very preachers of the Gospel. Therefore, Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas deemed it good

to appeal to the judgment of the head of the Church and the other Apostles, so that with their authority they could resolve any doubt.

Saint Peter therefore went from Rome to Jerusalem to convene a general council. Since the Lord has promised His assistance to the head of the Church, so that his faith may not fail, He certainly assists him also when the principal pastors of the Church are gathered with him, especially since Jesus Christ assured us that He would indeed be in the midst of those who, even if only two, gathered in His name. When the Prince of the Apostles arrived in that city, he invited all the other Apostles and all the primary pastors he could gather. Then Paul and Barnabas, welcomed into the council, presented their message on behalf of the Gentiles of Antioch. They showed the reasons and fears of both sides, asking for their deliberation for the peace and security of consciences. “There are,” said Saint Paul, “some of the sect of the Pharisees, who have believed and assert that it is necessary that, as the Jews, the Gentiles also be circumcised and must observe the law of Moses if they wish to obtain salvation.”

That venerable assembly began to examine this point, and after mature discussion on the proposed matter, Peter rose and began to speak saying: “Brothers, you know well how God chose me to make known to the Gentiles the light of the Gospel and the truths of the faith, as happened with Cornelius the Centurion and all his family. Now, God who knows the hearts of men, has borne witness to those good Gentiles by sending upon them the Holy Spirit, as He had done upon us, and He made no distinction between us and them, showing that faith had purified them from the impurities that previously excluded them from grace. Therefore, the matter is clear: without circumcision, the Gentiles are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Why then do we want to test God, as if provoking Him to give us a more certain proof of His will? Why impose on these our Gentile brothers a yoke that we and our fathers have been unable to bear? Therefore, we believe that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles must be saved.”

After the judgment of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the whole assembly fell silent and was quiet. Paul and Barnabas confirmed what Peter had said, recounting the conversions and the miracles that God had been pleased to work through them among the Gentiles they had converted to the Gospel.

When Paul and Barnabas had finished speaking, Saint James, Bishop of Jerusalem, confirmed Peter’s judgment by saying: “Brothers, now pay attention to me as well. Peter rightly said that from the beginning God granted grace to the Gentiles, forming a single people to glorify His holy name. Now this is confirmed by the words of the prophets, which we see fulfilled in these facts. For this reason, I judge with Peter that the Gentiles should not be troubled after they have converted

to Jesus Christ. Only it seems to me necessary to order them that, with regard to the weak conscience of the Jewish brothers and to facilitate the union between these two peoples, it be prohibited to eat things sacrificed to idols, strangled meats, blood, and fornication should also be prohibited."

This last thing, that is, fornication, did not need to be prohibited as it is entirely contrary to the dictates of reason and forbidden by the sixth article of the Decalogue. However, this prohibition was renewed regarding the Gentiles, because in the worship of their false deities they thought it was lawful, indeed pleasing, to make offerings of unclean and obscene things.

The judgment of Saint Peter thus confirmed by Saint James pleased the whole council. Therefore, by common agreement, they decided to choose authoritative persons to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. To these, in the name of the council, letters were delivered containing the decisions made. The letters were of this tenor: "The Apostles and priests, brothers to the Gentile brothers who are in Antioch, Syria, Cilicia, greetings. Having heard that some coming from here have troubled and distressed your consciences with arbitrary ideas, it seemed good to us here gathered to choose and send to you Paul and Barnabas, men very dear to us, who have sacrificed their lives and exposed themselves to danger for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. With them we send Silas and Judas, who will deliver our letters to you and will confirm to you verbally the same truths. In fact, it has been judged by the Holy Spirit and by us not to impose on you any other burden, except that which you must observe, namely to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from strangled meats, from blood, and from fornication. By abstaining from these things, you will do well. Stay in peace."

This was the first general council presided over by Saint Peter, where, as Prince of the Apostles and head of the Church, he defined the question with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, every faithful Christian must believe that the things defined by the general councils gathered and confirmed by the Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Jesus Christ and successor of Saint Peter, are very certain truths, which give the same reasons for credibility as if they came from the mouth of the Holy Spirit, because they represent the Church with its head, to whom God has promised His infallibility until the end of the ages.

CHAPTER XXV. Saint Peter confers the fullness of the Apostolate to Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas. — He is warned by Saint Paul. — He returns to Rome. *Year 54 of Jesus Christ.*

God had already made known several times that He wanted to send Saint Paul and Saint Barnabas to preach to the Gentiles. But until then, they exercised

their sacred ministry as simple priests, and perhaps also as bishops, without having yet been conferred the fullness of the apostolate. When they went to Jerusalem because of the council and recounted the wonders performed by God through them among the Gentiles, they also engaged in special conversations with Saint Peter, James, and John. They recounted, says the sacred text, great wonders to those who held the highest positions in the Church, among whom were certainly the three named Apostles, who considered themselves as the three main pillars of the Church. It was on this occasion, says Saint Augustine, that Saint Peter, as head of the Church, Vicar of Jesus Christ and divinely inspired, conferred upon Paul and Barnabas the fullness of the apostolate, with the task of bringing the light of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Thus, Saint Paul was elevated to the dignity of Apostle, with the same fullness of powers enjoyed by the other Apostles established by Jesus Christ.

While Saint Peter and Saint Paul were staying in Antioch, an event occurred that deserves to be reported. Saint Peter was certainly convinced that the ceremonies of the law of Moses were no longer obligatory for the Gentiles. However, when he was with the Jews, he ate in the Jewish manner, fearing to offend them if he acted otherwise. Such condescension caused many Gentiles to grow cold in their faith. Thus, aversion arose between Gentiles and Jews, and the bond of charity that characterises the true followers of Jesus Christ was broken. Saint Peter was unaware of the rumours that were circulating about this matter. But Saint Paul, noticing that Peter's conduct could generate scandal in the community of the faithful, thought to correct him publicly, saying: "If you, being a Jew, have come to know by faith that you can live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, why do you want to compel the Gentiles to observe the Jewish law by your example?" Saint Peter was very pleased with this advice, as it publicly declared to all the faithful that the ceremonial law of Moses was no longer obligatory, and as one who preached to others the humility of Jesus Christ, he knew how to practise it himself, showing no sign of resentment. From then on, he had no regard for the ceremonial law of Moses.

It should be noted here, however, with the Holy Fathers, that what Saint Peter was doing was not wrong in itself, yet it provided Christians with a reason for discord. It is also believed that Saint Peter agreed with Saint Paul regarding the correction to be made publicly, so that the cessation of the ceremonial law of Moses would be more widely known.

From Antioch, he went to preach in various cities until he was warned by God to return to Rome, to assist the faithful in a fierce persecution stirred up against Christians. When Saint Peter arrived in that city, Nero was governing the empire, a man full of vices and consequently the most opposed to Christianity. He

had deliberately set fire in various places in that capital, so that much of it was largely consumed by flames; and he then blamed the Christians for that wicked act.

In his cruelty, Nero had ordered the execution of a virtuous philosopher named Seneca, who had been his teacher. His own mother fell victim to that unnatural son. But the gravity of these misdeeds made a terrible impression even on Nero's hardened heart, so much so that he seemed to see spectres accompanying him day and night. Therefore, he sought to appease the infernal shadows, or rather the remorse of his conscience, with sacrifices. Wanting to procure some relief, he had the most reputable magicians sought out, to make use of their magic and their spells. The magician Simon, the same one who had tried to buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit from Saint Peter, took advantage of the absence of the Holy Apostle to go there and, through flattery towards the emperor, discredit the Christian religion.

CHAPTER XXVI. Saint Peter raises a dead man. *Year 66 of Jesus Christ.*

Simon the Magician knew that if he could perform some miracle, he would gain great credit. Those miracles that Saint Peter was performing everywhere only served to ignite in him more envy and anger. Therefore, he was studying some trick to make himself appear superior to Saint Peter. He confronted him several times, but always came away full of confusion. And since he boasted of being able to heal ailments, prolong life, and raise the dead—things he saw done by Saint Peter—it happened that he was invited to do the same. A young man from a noble family and a relative of the emperor had died. His parents, being inconsolable, were advised to turn to Saint Peter to bring him back to life. Others, instead, to invite Simon.

Both arrived at the house of the deceased at the same time. Saint Peter willingly agreed to let Simon try to restore life to the dead man. He knew that only God can perform true miracles, and that no one can boast of having performed them except by divine virtue and in confirmation of the Catholic faith, and that therefore all the efforts of the wicked Simon would be in vain. Full of arrogance and driven by the evil spirit, Simon foolishly accepted the challenge, and, convinced he would win, proposed the following condition. If Peter succeeds in raising the dead, I will be condemned to death, but if I give life to this corpse, Peter will pay with his head. Since none of those present refused that proposal, and Saint Peter willingly accepted it, the magician set to work.

He approached the coffin of the deceased and, invoking the demon and performing a thousand other spells, it seemed to some that the cold corpse showed some sign of life. Then Simon's supporters began to shout that Peter must die.

The Holy Apostle laughed at that deception and, modestly asking everyone

to be silent for a moment, said: “If the dead man has been raised, let him rise, walk, and speak; *si resuscitatus est, surgat, ambulet, fabuletur*. It is not true that he moves his head or shows any sign of life. It is your imagination that makes you think so. Command Simon to step away from the bed, and you will soon see all hope of life vanish from the dead man.[23]”

So it was done, and the one who had previously been dead continued to lie like a stone devoid of spirit and motion. Then the Holy Apostle knelt a short distance from the coffin and fervently prayed to the Lord, begging Him to glorify His holy name to the confusion of the wicked and to the comfort of the good. After a brief prayer, turning to the corpse, he said aloud: “Young man, arise; Jesus Lord gives you life and health.”

At the command of this voice, to which death was accustomed to obey, the spirit promptly returned to vivify that cold body, and so that it would not seem an illusion, he stood up, spoke, walked, and was given food. In fact, Peter took him by the hand and, alive and well, returned him to his mother. That good woman did not know how to express her gratitude to the Saint, and humbly begged him not to leave her house, so that he who had risen by his hands would not be abandoned. Saint Peter comforted her, saying: “We are servants of the Lord. He has raised him and will never abandon him. Do not fear for your son, for he has his guardian.”

Now it remained for the magician to be condemned to death, and already a crowd was ready to stone him under a rain of stones, if the Apostle, moved to pity for him, had not asked that he be left alive, saying that for him the shame he had experienced was punishment enough. “Let him live,” he said, “but let him live to see the Kingdom of Jesus Christ grow and expand ever more.”

CHAPTER XXVII. Flight. — Fall. — The desperate death of Simon the Magician. *Year 67 of Jesus Christ.*

In the resurrection of that young man, the magician Simon should have admired the goodness and charity of Peter and at the same time recognised the intervention of divine power, and thus abandon the demon he had served for so long. However, pride made him even more obstinate. Animated by the spirit of Satan, he became more furious than ever and resolved at all costs to take revenge against Saint Peter. With this thought, one day he went to Nero and told him that he was disgusted with the Galileans, that is, the Christians, that he was determined to abandon the world, and that to give everyone an infallible proof of his divinity, he wanted to ascend to Heaven by himself.

Nero was very pleased with the proposal. Since he always desired to find new pretexts to persecute Christians, he had Saint Peter notified, who, according to

him, was considered a great expert in magic, and challenged him to do the same and to prove that Simon was a liar, that if he did not do so, he himself would be judged a liar and impostor, and as such condemned to be beheaded. The Apostle, supported by the protection of Heaven, which never fails to come to the defence of truth, accepted the invitation. Saint Peter, therefore, without any human assistance, armed himself with the invincible shield of prayer. He also ordered all the faithful to unite their prayers with his through fasting. He ordered all the faithful to invoke divine mercy with universal fasting and continuous prayers. The day on which these religious practises were performed was Saturday, and from this came the Saturday fast, which was still practised in Rome in the time of St. Augustine in memory of this event.

On the contrary, the magician Simon, all emboldened by the favour promised to him by his demons, was preparing to plot and complete the fraud with them, and in his madness believed he could strike a blow against the Church of Jesus Christ. The designated day arrived. An immense crowd of people was gathered in a large square in Rome. Nero himself, with all his court, dressed in shining garments of gold and gems, was seated on a platform under a richly adorned pavilion, watching and encouraging his champion. A deep silence fell. Simon appeared dressed as if he were a God and, pretending to be calm, showed confidence in obtaining victory. While he was delivering pompous speeches, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared in the sky (it was all a diabolical illusion and a game of imagination), and being immersed in the magician in the sight of all the people, the demon lifted him off the ground and transported him through the air. He was already touching the clouds and beginning to disappear from the sight of the people, who, with their eyes raised upwards, rejoicing in wonder and clapping their hands, shouted: Victory! Miracle! Glory and honour to Simon, true son of the Gods!

Peter, in the company of St. Paul, without any ostentation, knelt on the ground and, with his hands raised to Heaven, fervently prayed to Jesus Christ to come to the aid of His Church to make truth triumph before that deluded people. Said and done: the hand of Almighty God, which had allowed the evil spirits to lift Simon to that height, suddenly took away all their power, so that, deprived of strength, they had to abandon him in the gravest danger and at the height of his glory. Stripped of Simon’s diabolical virtue, abandoned to the weight of his fat body, he fell with a disastrous crash, and plummeted to the ground with such force that, shattering all his limbs, his blood splattered even on Nero’s tribunal. Such a fall occurred near a temple dedicated to Romulus, where today the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian exists.

The unfortunate Simon would certainly have lost his life if Saint Peter had

not invoked God in his favour. Peter, says St. Maximus, prayed to the Lord to free him from death, both to make Simon aware of the weakness of his demons and because, confessing the power of Jesus Christ, he would implore from Him the forgiveness of his sins. But he who had long professed to despise the graces of the Lord was too obstinate to yield even in this case where God abounded in His mercy. Simon, having become the object of mockery for all the people, full of confusion, begged some of his friends to take him away from there. Taken to a nearby house, he survived a few more days, until, overwhelmed by pain and shame, he resorted to the desperate decision to rid himself of those miserable remnants of life and, throwing himself out of a window, voluntarily took his own life[24].

The fall of Simon is a vivid image of the fall of those Christians who, either renouncing the Christian religion or neglecting to observe it, fall from the sublime degree of virtue to which the Christian faith has raised them, and miserably ruin themselves in vices and disorders, to the dishonour of the Christian character and the religion they profess, and with sometimes irreparable damage to their souls.

CHAPTER XXVIII. Peter is sought for death. — Jesus appears to him and predicts his imminent martyrdom. — The holy Apostle’s Testament.

The punishment inflicted on Simon the Magician, while making evident the vengeance of Heaven, greatly contributed to increasing the number of Christians. Nero, however, seeing a multitude of people abandoning the profane worship of the Gods to profess the religion preached by Saint Peter, and having noticed that the Holy Apostle had succeeded in winning over people favoured by him, and those same people who were instruments of iniquity in court, felt his anger against Christians double and began to become even more cruel towards them.

In the midst of the fury of that persecution, Peter was tireless in encouraging the faithful to be steadfast in faith until death and in converting new Gentiles, so that the blood of the martyrs, far from terrifying Christians and diminishing their number, was a fruitful seed that multiplied them every day. Only the Jews of Rome, perhaps spurred on by the Jews of Judea, remained obstinate. Therefore, God, wanting to come to the ultimate test to overcome their obstinacy, had His Apostle publicly predict that shortly He would raise up a king against that nation, who, after reducing it to the gravest distress, would level their city to the ground, forcing its citizens to die of hunger and thirst. Then, he said to them, they would see some eat the bodies of others and consume each other, until, having fallen prey to their enemies, they would see before their eyes their wives, daughters, and children cruelly torn apart and killed upon the stones, their very lands would be reduced to desolation and ruin by sword and fire. Those who escape the common disaster will

be sold like pack animals and subjected to perpetual servitude. Such evils will come upon you, oh children of Jacob, because you rejoiced at the death of the Son of God and now refuse to believe in Him[25].

But knowing well that the ministers of persecution would toil in vain if they did not remove the head of the Christians, they turned against him to have him in their hands and put him to death. The faithful, considering the loss they would suffer with his death, sought every means to prevent him from falling into the hands of the persecutors. When they realised that it was impossible for him to remain hidden any longer, they advised him to leave Rome and retreat to a place where he was less known. Peter refused such advice suggested by filial love and rather ardently desired the crown of martyrdom. But, as the faithful continued to pray him to do this for the good of the Church of God, that is, to try to preserve his life to instruct, confirm the believers in faith, and win souls for Christ, he finally consented and decided to leave.

At night he took leave of the faithful to escape the fury of the idolaters. But when he reached outside the city, through the 'Porta Capena' gate, now called the San Sebastiano Gate, Jesus Christ appeared to him in the same form in which he had known Him and frequented for many years. The Apostle, although surprised by this unexpected appearance, nevertheless, according to his readiness of spirit, took courage to ask Him, saying: "Oh Lord, where are you going?" *Domine, quo vadis*? Jesus replied: "I come to Rome to be crucified again." Having said this, He disappeared.

From those words, Peter understood that his own crucifixion was imminent, for he knew that the Lord could no longer be crucified again for Himself, but must be crucified in the person of His Apostle. In memory of this event, outside the San Sebastiano Gate, a church was built, still called today "*Domine, quo vadis*," or "*Santa Maria ad Passus*," that is, Saint Mary at the Feet, because the Saviour in that place, where He spoke to Saint Peter, left the sacred imprint of His feet on a stone. This stone is still preserved in the Church of San Sebastiano.

After that warning, Saint Peter turned back and, when questioned by the Christians of Rome about the reason for his swift return, he told them everything. No one had any doubt that Peter would be imprisoned and would glorify the Lord by giving his life for Him. Therefore, in fear of falling at any moment into the hands of the persecutors and that in those calamitous moments the Church would be left without its supreme pastor, Peter thought to appoint some more zealous bishops, so that one of them would succeed him in the Pontificate after his death. These were Saint Linus, Saint Cletus, Saint Clement, and Saint Anacletus, who had already assisted him in the office of his vicars in various needs of the Church.

Not content with having thus provided for the needs of the Papal See, Saint Peter also wanted to send a letter to all the faithful, as if for his testament, that is, a second letter. This letter is addressed to the universal body of Christians, naming in particular those of Pontus, Galatia, and other provinces of Asia where he had preached.

After referring again to the things already mentioned in his first letter, he recommends always keeping their eyes on Jesus the Saviour, guarding against the corruption of this age and worldly pleasures. To resolve them to remain steadfast in virtue, he sets before them the rewards that the Saviour has prepared in the eternal kingdom of Heaven. At the same time, he recalls to their memory the terrible punishments with which God often punishes sinners even in this life, but infallibly in the next with the eternal penalty of fire. Then, turning his thoughts to the future, he predicts the scandals that many wicked men would present, the errors they would disseminate, and the tricks they would use to propagate them. “But know this,” he says, “that these are all impostors and seducers of souls, like springs without water and dark mists driven by the winds, who promise a freedom that always ends in a miserable slavery, in which they themselves are ensnared; after which judgment, perdition, and fire are reserved for them.”

“For me,” he continues, “I am certain, according to the revelation received from Our Lord Jesus Christ, that shortly I must leave this tabernacle of my body, but I will ensure that even after my death you have the means to recall such things to your mind. Be assured, the promises of the Lord will never fail. The final day will come when the Heavens will cease to be, the elements will be dissolved or devoured by fire, and the earth with all that it contains will be consumed. Therefore, be occupied in works of piety, let us patiently and joyfully await the coming of the day of the Lord, and, according to His promises, let us live in such a way as to pass to the contemplation of the heavens and the possession of eternal glory.”

Then he urges them to keep themselves free from sin and to constantly believe that the long patience that the Lord often shows us is for our common good. He strongly recommends not to interpret the Holy Scriptures with private understanding of each individual, and particularly notes the letters of Saint Paul, whom he calls his dearest brother, of whom he says: “Jesus Christ delays his coming to give you time to convert. These things were written to you by Paul, our dearest brother, according to the wisdom that has been given to him by God. He does the same in all his letters, where he speaks of these same things. However, be very careful that in these letters there are some things hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable men twist to their own destruction, as they do with other parts of the Holy Scripture, which they misuse to their own perdition.” These words

deserve to be carefully considered by Protestants, who want to entrust the interpretation of the Bible to any man of the people, no matter how uncultivated and ignorant he may be. What Saint Peter says can be applied to these words, namely that the whimsical interpretation of the Bible resulted in their own destruction: ***ad suam ipsorum perditionem[26].***

CHAPTER XXIX. In prison Saint Peter converts Processus and Martinian. — His martyrdom**[27]**. *Year 67 of the Common Era.*

Finally, the moment had come when the predictions made by Jesus Christ regarding the death of his Apostle had to be fulfilled. So many labours deserved to be crowned with the palm of Martyrdom. One day, feeling all aflame with love for the person of the Divine Saviour and eagerly desiring to join Him as soon as possible, he was surprised by persecutors who immediately bound him and led him to a deep and dark prison called Mamertine Prison, where the most notorious criminals were usually confined[28]. Divine Providence arranged for Nero to be away from Rome for some time due to government affairs, thus, Saint Peter remained in prison for about nine months. But the true servants of the Lord know how to promote the glory of God at all times and in all places.

In the darkness of the prison, Peter, exercising the cares of his apostolate and especially the ministry of the Divine Word, had the consolation of converting to Jesus Christ the two guards of the prison, named Processus and Martinian, along with 47 other people who were confined in the same place.

It is said, and confirmed by the authority of accredited writers, that since there was no water there to administer Baptism to those new converts, God caused a perennial spring to gush forth at that moment, whose waters continue to flow even today. Travellers who go to Rome make it a point to visit the Mamertine Prison, which is at the foot of the Capitol, where the miraculous fountain still springs forth. That building, both underground and above ground, is an object of great veneration among Christians.

The ministers of the emperor tried several times to overcome the steadfastness of the holy Apostle, but, seeing that all their efforts were in vain, and moreover seeing that, even in chains, he did not cease to preach Jesus Christ and thus increase the number of Christians, they decided to silence him with death. It was one morning when Peter saw the prison open. The executioners entered, bound him tightly, and announced that he was to be led to execution. Oh! Then his heart was filled with joy. “I rejoice,” he exclaimed, “because soon I will see my Lord. Soon I will go to meet Him whom I have loved and from whom I have received so many signs of affection and mercy.”

Before being led to execution, the holy Apostle, according to Roman law, had to undergo painful flogging. This caused him great joy, for thus he became an ever more faithful follower of his Divine Master, who before being crucified underwent similar punishment.

The path he took to the place of execution is also worth noting. The Romans, conquerors of the world, after subjugating some nations, prepared the procession of triumph on a magnificent chariot in the valley or rather in the plain at the foot of the Vatican hill. From there, by the sacred way, also called the triumphal way, the victors ascended triumphantly to the Capitol. Saint Peter, after having subjected the world to the sweet yoke of Christ, was also led out of prison and along the same road to the place where those great solemnities were being prepared.

Thus, he also celebrated the ceremony of triumph and offered himself as a holocaust to the Lord, outside the gate of Rome, just as outside Jerusalem his Divine Master had been crucified.

Between the Janiculum[29] hill and the Vatican, there was a valley where, gathering the waters, a marsh was formed. On the other peak of the mountain overlooking the marsh was the place destined for the martyrdom of the greatest man in the world. The intrepid athlete, when he arrived at the place of execution and saw the cross on which he was condemned to die, full of courage and joy exclaimed: “Hail, Oh cross, salvation of nations, standard of Christ, Oh dearest cross, hail, Oh comfort of Christians. You are what assures me the way to Heaven, you are what assures me entry into the Kingdom of Glory. You that I once saw reddened with the most holy blood of my Master, today be my help, my comfort, my salvation.[30]“

However, Saint Peter considered it too great an honour for himself to die in a manner similar to that of his Divine Master. Therefore, he prayed to his crucifiers that, as a grace, they would allow him to die with his head down. Since this manner of dying caused him more suffering, the grace was easily granted to him. But his body could not naturally remain on the cross if his hands and feet were only nailed. Therefore, his holy limbs were bound with ropes to that hard trunk.

He was accompanied to the place of execution by an infinite crowd of Christians and infidels. That man of God, amidst the very torments, almost forgetting himself, consoled the first so that they would not grieve for him and worked to save the latter, urging them to leave the worship of idols and embrace the Gospel, so that they could know the one true God, creator of all things. The Lord, who always directed the zeal of such a faithful minister, consoled him in those last agonies with the conversion of a great number of idolaters of every condition and sex[31].

While Saint Peter hung on the cross, God also wished to console him with a heavenly vision. Two angels appeared to him with two crowns of lilies and roses, to indicate to him that his sufferings had come to an end and that he was to be crowned with glory in blessed eternity[32].

Saint Peter achieved such a noble triumph on the cross on June 29, in the seventieth year of Jesus Christ and the sixty-seventh of the Common Era. On the same day that Saint Peter died on the cross, Saint Paul, under the sword of the same tyrant, glorified Jesus Christ by being beheaded. This was truly a glorious day for all the Churches of Christendom, but especially for that of Rome, which, after being founded by Peter and long nourished with the doctrine of both these Princes of the Apostles, is now consecrated by their martyrdom, by their blood, and exalted above all the churches of the world.

Thus, while the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem was imminent and its temple was to be burned, Rome, which was the capital and mistress of all nations, became through those two Apostles the Jerusalem of the New Covenant, the eternal city, and far more glorious than the old Jerusalem, as the grace of the Gospel and the priesthood of the new law are greater than the priesthood, all the ceremonies, and figures of the old law.

Saint Peter was martyred at the age of 86, after a pontificate of 35 years, 3 months, and 4 days. He spent three years especially in Jerusalem. He then held his chair for seven years in Antioch, the remainder in Rome.

CHAPTER XXX. The tomb of Saint Peter. — The attack on his body.

As soon as Saint Peter took his last breath, many Christians left the place of execution weeping for the death of the supreme Shepherd of the Church. Moreover, Saint Linus, his disciple and immediate successor, two priest brothers Saint Marcellus and Saint Apuleius, Saint Anacletus, and other fervent Christians gathered around the cross of Saint Peter. When the executioners then left the place of martyrdom, they laid the body of the holy Apostle, anointed it with precious perfumes, embalmed it, and took it to be buried near the Circus, that is, near Nero’s gardens on the Vatican Hill, precisely in the place where it is still venerated today. His body was placed in a site where many martyrs, disciples of the holy Apostles and early devotees of the Catholic Church, had already been buried, who by order of Nero had been exposed to wild beasts, or crucified, or burned, or killed by unheard-of torments. Saint Anacletus had erected a small cemetery there, in one corner of which he raised a kind of oratory where the body of Saint Peter rests. This site became famous, and all the popes succeeding Saint Peter always showed a lively desire to be buried there.

Shortly after the death of Saint Peter, some Christians from the East came to Rome, who, considering it a great treasure to possess the relics of the holy Apostle, resolved to acquire them. But, knowing that it would be useless to try to buy them with money, they thought of stealing them, as if they were their own, and bringing them back to those places from where the saint had come. Therefore, they courageously went to the tomb, extracted the body from there, and took it to the catacombs, which are an underground place, currently called Saint Sebastian, with the intention of sending it to the East as soon as the opportunity arose.

God, however, who had called that great Apostle to Rome to glorify it with martyrdom, also arranged for his body to be preserved in that city and to make that church the most glorious in the world. Therefore, when those Easterners went to carry out their plan, a storm arose with such a strong whirlwind that, due to the rumbling of the thunder and the flashing of the lightning, they were forced to interrupt their work.

The Christians of Rome noticed what had happened, and in great numbers, having left the city, they took the body of the holy Apostle back and brought it again to the Vatican Hill from where it had been taken[33].

In the year 103, Saint Anacletus, having become Supreme Pontiff, seeing that the persecutions against Christians had somewhat calmed, at his own expense raised a small temple to enclose the relics and the entire tomb existing there. This is the first church dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles.

This sacred deposit remained exposed to the veneration of the faithful until the middle of the Third Century. Only in the year 221, due to the ferocity with which Christians were persecuted, fearing that the bodies of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul would be profaned by the infidels, were they transported by the Pontiff to the catacombs called the Cemetery of Saint Callixtus, in that part which today is called the Cemetery of Saint Sebastian. But in the year 255, Pope Saint Cornelius, at the prayer and request of Saint Lucina and other Christians, brought the body of Saint Paul back on the way to Ostia, to the place where he had been beheaded. The body of Saint Peter was again transported and placed in the original tomb at the foot of the Vatican Hill.

CHAPTER XXXI. Tomb and Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican.

In the early centuries of the Church, the faithful could not mostly go to the tomb of Saint Peter without the grave danger of being accused as Christians and brought before the tribunals of the persecutors. However, there was always a great gathering of people who came from distant lands to invoke the protection of Heaven at the tomb of Saint Peter. But when Constantine became the master of the Roman

Empire and put an end to the persecutions, then everyone could freely show themselves as followers of Jesus Christ, and the tomb of Saint Peter became the sanctuary of the Christian world, where people came from every corner to venerate the relics of the first Vicar of Jesus Christ. The Emperor himself publicly professed the Gospel, and among the many signs he gave of his attachment to the Catholic religion, one was that he had various churches built, including one in honour of the Prince of the Apostles, which is why it is sometimes also called the Constantinian Basilica, more commonly known as St. Peter's Basilica.

Therefore, in the year 319, Constantine, at his own initiative and at the invitation of Saint Sylvester, established that the site of the new Church be at the foot of the Vatican, with the design that it would encompass the small temple built by Saint Anacletus, which until that time had been the object of common veneration. On the day that Emperor Constantine wanted to begin the holy undertaking, he laid down the imperial diadem and all the royal insignia on the site, then prostrated himself on the ground and shed many tears out of devoted tenderness. Taking up the spade, he began to dig the ground with his own hands, thus starting the excavation of the foundations of the new basilica. He himself wanted to form the design and establish the space that was to encompass the new temple. Also, to encourage others to lend a hand to the work with eagerness, he wanted to carry on his shoulders twelve small boxes of earth in honour of the twelve Apostles. Then the body of Saint Peter was unearthed, and in the presence of numerous faithful and clergy, it was placed by Saint Sylvester in a large silver chest, with another gilded bronze chest placed immovably on the ground above it. The urn that contained the sacred deposit was five feet high, wide, and long. A large cross of pure gold weighing one hundred and fifty pounds, upon which were inscribed the names of Saint Helena and her son Constantine, was placed above it. Once that majestic building was completed, a crypt or underground chamber entirely adorned with gold and precious gems, surrounded by a multitude of gold and silver lamps, was prepared to house the precious treasure: the head of Saint Peter. Saint Sylvester invited many bishops and Christian faithful from all over the world attended this solemnity. To encourage them even more, he opened the treasure of the Church and granted many indulgences. The gathering was extraordinary. The solemnity was majestic. It was the first consecration that was made publicly with rites and ceremonies such as are still practised today in the consecration of sacred buildings. The function was completed in the year 324 on the eighteenth of November. The urn of Saint Peter, thus closed, was never reopened, and it has always been an object of veneration throughout Christendom. Constantine donated many resources for the decor and preservation of that august

building. All the supreme Pontiffs competed to make the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles glorious.

But all human things wear out over time, and St. Peter's Basilica found itself in danger of ruin in the Sixteenth Century. Therefore, the Pontiffs decided to completely rebuild it. After much study, after great efforts and expenses, the foundation stone of the new temple was laid in the year 1506. The great Pope Julius II, despite his advanced age and the deep chasm he had to descend to reach the base of the dome's pillar, nevertheless wanted to descend in person to solemnly establish and place the first stone. It is difficult to describe the efforts, the work, the money, the time, and the men that were employed in this marvellous construction.

The work was completed over the span of one hundred and twenty years, and finally Urban VIII, assisted by 22 cardinals and all those dignitaries who usually take part in papal functions, solemnly consecrated the majestic basilica on November 18, 1626, that is, on the same day that Saint Sylvester had consecrated the ancient basilica erected by Constantine. Throughout this time, amidst so many restorations and construction works, the relics of Saint Peter underwent no translation. Neither the urn nor the bronze chest were moved, nor was the crypt opened. The new floor, having to be somewhat elevated above the old one, was arranged to enclose the primitive chapel and thus leave the altar consecrated by Saint Sylvester intact. In this regard, it is noted that when the Architect Giacomo della Porta raised the layers of the floor around the old altar to overlay it with the new, he discovered the window that corresponded to the sacred urn. Lowering a light inside, he recognised the golden cross placed there by Constantine and his mother Saint Helena. He immediately reported everything to the Pope, who in 1594 was Clement VIII, and, accompanied by Cardinals Bellarmino and Antoniano, he personally went to the site and found what the architect had reported. The Pontiff did not want to open either the tomb or the urn, nor did he allow anyone to approach them, rather he ordered that the opening be sealed with cement. From then on, the tomb was never opened again, nor did anyone approach those venerable relics.

Travellers who go to Rome to visit the great Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican, when they first see it, remain as if enchanted. Also, the most famous figures for intellect and science, when returning to their countries, can only give a faint idea of it.

Here is what can be easily understood. The church is adorned with the most exquisite marbles that could be obtained. Its breadth and elevation reach a point that astonishes the eye that gazes upon it. The floor, the walls and the vault are decorated with such mastery that they seem to have exhausted all the inventions of

art. The dome, which, so to speak, rises to the clouds, is a compendium of all the beauties of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Above the dome, indeed above the very cupola, there is a sphere or ball of gilded bronze that, viewed from the ground, looks like a small game ball. But those who ascend and enter see a globe within which sixteen people can comfortably sit. In a word, in this Basilica, everything is so beautiful, so rare, and so well-crafted that it surpasses what can be imagined in the world. Princes, kings, monarchs, and emperors have contributed to adorn this marvellous building with magnificent gifts sent to the tomb of Saint Peter, often brought there by them from the most distant lands.

And it is precisely in the centre of such a magnificent building that rest the precious ashes of a poor fisherman, a man without human erudition and without riches, whose fortune consisted of a net. And this was willed by God so that men might understand how God, in His omnipotence, takes the most humble man in the eyes of the world to place him on the glorious throne to govern His people. They will also understand how He honours, even in this life, His faithful servants, and thus form some idea of the immense glory reserved in Heaven for those who live and die in His divine service. Kings, princes, emperors, and the greatest monarchs of the earth have come to implore the protection of the one who was taken from a boat to be made the supreme shepherd of the Church. Even heretics and infidels were compelled to respect him. God could have chosen the supreme shepherd of His Church from among the greatest and wisest of the earth. But then perhaps those wonders would have been attributed to their wisdom and power, which God wanted to be entirely recognised as coming from His omnipotent hand.

Only in very rare cases have the popes allowed the relics of this great protector of Rome to be transported elsewhere. Therefore, few places in Christendom can boast possessing them: all the glory is in Rome.

Whoever would wish to write about the many pilgrimages made there at all times, from all parts of the world and from every class of people, the multitude of graces received there and the astounding miracles performed there would have to write many large volumes.

Meanwhile, filled with feelings of sincere gratitude, as a conclusion and fruit of what we have said about the actions of the Prince of the Apostles, we raise fervent prayers to the throne of the Most High God. We pray this fortunate Vicar and glorious martyr to deign to turn a merciful gaze from Heaven upon the present needs of His Church, to deign to protect and support her in the fierce assaults she must endure daily from her enemies, to obtain strength and courage for her successors, for all bishops, and for all sacred ministers, so that all may be worthy of the ministry entrusted to them by Christ, so that, comforted by His heavenly help,

they may bring forth abundant fruits from their labours, promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls among the Christian peoples.

Blessed are those peoples who are united to Peter in the person of his successor Popes. They walk the path of salvation, while all those who find themselves outside this path and do not belong to the union of Peter have no hope of salvation. Jesus Christ Himself assures us that holiness and salvation can only be found in union with Peter, upon whom rests the immovable foundation of His Church. Let us heartily thank divine goodness for making us children of Peter.

And since he has the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, let us pray to him to be our protector in our present needs, and so on the last day of our life, may he deign to open for us the door to blessed eternity.

APPENDIX ON THE COMING OF ST. PETER TO ROME

Although discussions on particular facts may be considered foreign to the historian, nevertheless the coming of St. Peter to Rome, which is one of the most important points in ecclesiastical history, being fervently contested by today's heretics, seems to me a matter of such importance that it should not be omitted.

This seems all the more appropriate because Protestants for some time in their books, newspapers, and conversations have sought to make it an object of reasoning, always with the aim of casting doubt on it and discrediting our holy Catholic religion. They do this to diminish, indeed to destroy, if they could, the authority of the Pope since they say that if Peter did not come to Rome, the Roman Pontiffs are not his successors, and therefore not heirs of his powers. But the efforts of the heretics only show how powerful the authority of the Pope is against them, and to free themselves from it, they are not ashamed to fabricate lies, distorting and denying history. We believe that this single fact will suffice to reveal the great malice that reigns among them, for to doubt the coming of St. Peter to Rome is the same as doubting whether there is light when the sun shines at high noon.

I find it appropriate to point out here that until the fourteenth century, over the span of about fourteen hundred years, there is not a single author, either Catholic or heretical, who has raised the slightest doubt about the coming of St. Peter to Rome. Also, we invite the adversaries to cite even one. The first to raise this doubt was Marsilius of Padua, who sold his pen to Emperor Louis the Bavarian, and both, one with arms, the other with perverse doctrines, unleashed themselves against the primacy of the Supreme Pontiff. This doubt, however, was considered ridiculous by all and vanished with the death of its author.

Two hundred years later, in the sixteenth century, the turbulent spirits of Luther and Calvin arose, and from their school came several who, surpassing the

malice of their own masters, sought to raise the same doubt to better deceive the simple and the ignorant. Anyone who is somewhat familiar with history knows what credit is due to one who, relying solely on his whim, contradicts a fact reported with unanimous consent by writers of all times and places. This single observation would suffice to make manifest the insubstantiality of such doubt. However, so that the reader may know the authors whose authority comes to confirm what we assert, we will cite a few. Since Protestants admit the authority of the Church of the first four centuries, we, eager to please them in all that is possible, will use writers who lived in that time. Some of them assert that Peter was in Rome, and others attest that he founded his episcopal seat there and suffered martyrdom there.

St. Clement Pope, a disciple of Saint Peter and his successor in the papacy, in his first letter written to the Corinthians, gives as public and certain the coming of Saint Peter to Rome, his long stay there, and the martyrdom suffered there along with St. Paul. Here are his words: “The example of these men, who, living holily, gathered a great multitude of the elect and suffered many tortures and torments, has remained excellent among us.”

St. Ignatius the martyr, also a disciple of St. Peter and his successor in the bishopric of Antioch, being led to Rome to be martyred there, writes to the Romans begging them not to want to impede his martyrdom and says: “I beg you, I do not command you, as Peter and Paul did: *Non ut Petrus et Paulus praecipio vobis*.”

The same is affirmed by Papias, a contemporary of the aforementioned and a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, as can be seen in Eusebius in his Ecclesiastical History, Book 2, Chapter 15.

Not far from these, we have the illustrious testimonies of St. Irenaeus and St. Dionysius, who long knew and conversed with the disciples of the Apostles and were very well informed about the events that occurred within the Church of Rome.

St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon and martyred in the year 202, attests that St. Matthew spread his Gospel to the Jews in their own language, while Peter and Paul preached in Rome and established the Church: *Petro et Paulo Romae evangelizantibus et constituentibus Ecclesiam**[34]***. After such testimonies, we do not know how the heretics dare to deny the coming of St. Peter to Rome. Almost at the same time flourished Clement of Alexandria, St. Caius, priest of Rome, Tertullian of Carthage, Origen, St. Cyprian, and many others, who all agree in reporting the great gathering of the faithful at the tomb of St. Peter martyred in Rome, and all, filled with reverence for the primacy enjoyed by the Church of Rome, say that from it one must expect the oracles of eternal salvation, because Jesus Christ has promised the preservation of the faith to its founder St. Peter[35].

And if from these writers we move to the luminaries of the Church, St. Peter

of Alexandria, St. Asterius of Amasea, St. Optatus of Milevis, St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Epiphanius, St. Maximus of Turin, St. Augustine, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and many others, we find their testimonies fully unanimous and concordant on the truth we assert: namely, that Peter was in Rome and suffered martyrdom there. St. Optatus, Bishop of Milevis in Africa, writing against the Donatists says: “You cannot deny, you know, that in the city of Rome the episcopal chair was held by Peter from the beginning.” For the sake of brevity, we will only quote the words of the Doctor St. Jerome, who flourished in the 4th century of the Church. “Peter, prince of the Apostles,” he writes, “went to Rome in the second year of Emperor Claudius, and there held the priestly chair until the last year of Nero. Buried in Rome in the Vatican, near the Via Trionfale, he is famous for the veneration that the universe pays him.[36]” Let us add the many martyrologies of the various Latin Churches that have come down to us from the most remote antiquity, the different Calendars of the Ethiopians, Egyptians, Syrians, the Menologion of the Greeks, the same liturgies of all the Christian Churches scattered in various countries of Christendom, everywhere the truth of this account is recorded.

What more? The same Protestants, somewhat renowned in doctrine, such as Gave, Ammendo, Pearson, Grotius, Usher, Biondello, Scaliger, Basnage and Newton, along with many others, agree that the coming of the prince of the Apostles to Rome and his death in that metropolis of the universe is an indisputable fact.

It is true that neither the Acts of the Apostles nor St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans mention this fact. But besides the fact that accredited writers recognise in these authors a clear reference to such an event[37], we observe that the author of the Acts of the Apostles did not aim to write about the actions of St. Peter or the other Apostles, but only those of St. Paul, his companion and teacher, and this almost to make an apology for this Apostle of the Gentiles, the most despised and slandered by the Jews. Therefore, St. Luke, after narrating the beginnings of the Church from Chapter XVI to the end of his book, writes no more about others except for Paul and his missionary companions. In fact, in his Acts, Luke does not even recount all the things done by Paul, things we know only from the letters of this Apostle. Indeed, does he perhaps speak of the three shipwrecks suffered by his Master, the struggle he had to endure in Ephesus with the beasts, and other deeds mentioned in his Second Letter to the Corinthians and in that to the Galatians[38]? Does St. Luke perhaps speak of Paul’s martyrdom, or even just of those things he did after his first imprisonment in Rome? Does he perhaps mention even one of the 14 letters? None of this. Now, what a wonder if the same writer remained silent about many things done by Peter, including his coming to Rome?

What we said about the silence of St. Luke applies to the silence of St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans. Paul, writing to the Romans, does not greet Peter. Thus, Protestants conclude that Peter was never in Rome. What a strange line of reasoning! At most, one could deduce that Peter was not in Rome at that time, and no more than that. And who does not know that Peter, while holding the see of Rome, often left to go elsewhere to establish other Churches in various parts of Italy? Did he not do the same when he held his see in Jerusalem and Antioch? It was precisely during that time that he travelled to various parts of Palestine, and then to Asia Minor, Bithynia, Pontus, Galatia, and Cappadocia, to all of which he especially addressed his first letter. Therefore, it is not to be supposed that he did not do the same in Italy, which offered him a very abundant harvest. Moreover, that Peter was not only concerned with Rome in Italy is known from Eusebius, a 4th-century historian, who, writing about the main things he accomplished, expresses himself as follows: “The evidence of the things done by Peter is those very Churches that soon after shone, such as, for example, the Church of Caesarea in Palestine, that of Antioch in Syria, and the Church of the very city of Rome. It has been handed down to posterity that Peter himself established these Churches and all those surrounding them. And so also those in Egypt and the same Alexandria, although not by himself, but through Mark his disciple, while he was occupied in Italy and among the surrounding peoples.[39]“

Therefore, Paul in his Letter to the Romans does not greet Peter because he knew that at that time he was perhaps not in Rome. Certainly, if Peter had been there, he could have himself resolved the issue that arose among those faithful, which prompted Paul to write his famous letter.

And then, even if Peter had been in the city, it can well be said that Paul in his letter did not leave it to the faithful to greet him along with the others, because he had him greeted separately by the bearer of the same, or he wrote to him individually as we still do today with people of importance. Moreover, if Paul, writing to the Romans, did not have Peter greeted, it would prove that Peter was never in Rome, then we should also say that St. James the Less was never Bishop of Jerusalem, because Paul, writing to the Hebrews, does not greet him at all. Now, all antiquity proclaims St. James as Bishop of Jerusalem. Therefore, Paul’s silence does not conclude against the coming of St. Peter to Rome.

Let us add: if from the silence of Sacred Scripture regarding the coming of St. Peter to Rome it could reasonably be inferred that Peter did not come to Rome, then one could also argue this way: Sacred Scripture does not say that St. Peter died. Therefore, St. Peter is still alive, and you Protestants look for him in some corner of the earth.

There is also a reason for the silence of Sacred Scripture about the coming and death of St. Peter in Rome, and we do not want to keep it silent. That Peter is the head of the Church, the supreme pastor, the infallible teacher of all the faithful, and that these prerogatives should be passed down to his successors until the end of the world is a dogma of faith, and therefore it had to be revealed either through Sacred Scripture or through divine Tradition, as it was. But that he came and died in Rome is a historical fact, a fact that could be seen with the eyes, touched with the hands; and therefore a testimony from Sacred Scripture was not necessary to ascertain it, as those proofs that announce and confirm to man all other facts were sufficient for this. Protestants who claim to deny the coming of St. Peter to Rome because it cannot be proven with biblical arguments fall into ridicule. What would they themselves say of someone who denied the coming and death of Emperor Augustus in the city of Nola because Scripture does not say so? If we want to dwell on this silence of the Acts of the Apostles and the Letter of St. Paul, let us say that this does not prove anything for us or for the Protestants. Because sound logic and simple natural reason teach us that when seeking the truth of a fact omitted by an author, one must seek among others who are responsible for speaking about it. This is what we have abundantly done.

We are also aware that Josephus Flavius does not speak of this coming of St. Peter to Rome, nor does he speak of St. Paul. But what does it matter to him to speak of Christians? His purpose was to write the history of the Jewish people and the Jewish war, not the particular events that occurred elsewhere. He does speak of Jesus Christ, of St. John the Baptist, of St. James, whose death occurred in Palestine. But does he perhaps speak of St. Paul, of St. Andrew, or of the other Apostles, who were crowned with martyrdom outside of Palestine? And does he not himself say that he intends to pass over many events that occurred in his time in silence[40]?

Moreover, is it not foolish to trust more in a Jew who does not speak than in the early Christians who all unanimously proclaim that St. Peter died in Rome, after having dwelt there for many years?

We do not want to omit the difficulty that some raise about the disagreement of writers in fixing the year of St. Peter’s coming to Rome. Because in our times, scholars commonly agree on the chronology we follow. But we say that this disagreement among ancient writers demonstrates the truth of the fact: it shows that one writer did not copy from another, that each used those documents or those memories that he had in their respective countries and that were publicly known as certain. Nor should we be surprised by such chronological disagreement (which is one or two years more or less) in those remote times when each nation had its own way of counting the years. But all these authors frankly refer to such

coming of St. Peter to Rome and mention the minute circumstances regarding his dwelling and death in that city.

Those who are against the coming of St. Peter to Rome also add: in the first letter of St. Peter to the faithful of Asia, it is implied that he was in Babylon. Thus, he expresses himself in his greetings: “The Church in Babylon sends you greetings, and so does my son Mark.” Therefore, his coming to Rome is impossible. Let us begin by saying that even if Babylon, of which Peter speaks, were intended to mean the metropolis of Assyria, it could still not be assumed that he could not have come, and did not come to Rome. His pontificate was very long, and critics agree in saying that the aforementioned letter was written before the year 43, or around that time. In fact, he still greets the faithful in the name of Mark, who we know from Eusebius was sent by Peter to establish the Church of Alexandria in the year 43 of Jesus Christ. It follows that Peter, from the date of his letter until his death, had at least another 24 years of life. In such a long interval of time, could he not have made the journey to Rome?

But we have another answer to give; and that is that Peter spoke metaphorically and with the name of Babylon he meant the city of Rome, where he was indeed writing his letter. This is derived from all antiquity. Papias, a disciple of the Apostles, clearly states that Peter showed that he wrote his first letter in Rome, while by a transliteration of the word he gives it the name of Babylon[41]. St. Jerome similarly says that Peter, in his first letter, under the name of Babylon signified the city of Rome: *Petrus in epistola prima sub nomine Babylonis figurative Romam significans, salutat vos, inquit, ecclesia quae est in Babylone collecta****[42]***. Nor was this language unusual among Christians. St. John gives Rome the same name of Babylon. In his Apocalypse, after calling Rome the city of the seven hills, the great city that reigns over the kings of the earth, he announces its fall, writing: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.[43]” Indeed, it was quite right for Rome to be called a Babylon, because it contained within itself all the errors spread in the various parts of the world that it dominated.

Moreover, Peter had good reasons to keep the literal name of the place from which he was writing silent, because having just escaped from the hands of Herod Agrippa, and knowing how there was a close friendship between this king and Emperor Claudius, he could justly fear some ambush from these two enemies of the Christian name, should his letter have gone astray. To avoid this danger, therefore, prudence dictated that he use a word known to Christians and unknown to the Jews and Gentiles in his writing. Thus he did.

In addition, from Peter’s own words, another proof of his coming to Rome can be derived. In fact, Peter, concluding his letter, says: “The Church sends you its

greetings … and so does my son Mark.” Therefore, Mark was with Peter. This being said, all tradition unanimously proclaims that Mark, Peter’s spiritual son, his disciple, his interpreter, and I would say his secretary, was in Rome and in this city wrote the Gospel that he heard preached by the same Master[44]. Therefore, it is necessary to also admit that Peter was in Rome with the disciple.

Now we can come to this conclusion. For the period of fourteen hundred years, there was never anyone who raised the slightest doubt against the coming of St. Peter to Rome. On the contrary, we have a long series of men celebrated for holiness and doctrine, who from apostolic times until our days have always accepted it with their authority. The liturgies, the martyrologies, the very enemies of Christianity agree with the majority of Protestants on this fact.

Therefore, you, Oh Protestants of today, opposing the coming of St. Peter to Rome, oppose all antiquity, you oppose the authority of the most learned and pious men of past times. You oppose the martyrologies, the menologies, the liturgies, the calendars of antiquity. You oppose what your own teachers wrote.

Oh, Protestants, open your eyes. Listen to the words of a friend who speaks to you moved solely by the desire for your good. Many claim to be your guides in the truth, but either out of malice or ignorance, they deceive you. Listen to the voice of God calling you to His fold, under the care of the supreme pastor established by Him. Abandon every commitment, overcome the obstacle of human respect, renounce the errors into which deluded men have plunged you. Return to the religion of your ancestors, which some of your forebears abandoned. Invite all the followers of the Reformation to listen to what Tertullian said in his time: “Therefore, Oh Christian, if you want to secure yourself in the great matter of salvation, resort to the Churches founded by the Apostles. Go to Rome, whence our authority emanates. Oh happy Church, where with their blood they shed all their doctrine, where Peter suffered a martyrdom similar to the passion of his Divine Master, where Paul was crowned with martyrdom by having his head cut off, where John, after being immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil, suffered nothing and was therefore exiled to the island of Patmos.[45]“

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[1] The news regarding the life of Saint Peter derives from the Gospel, the Acts, and some letters of the Apostles, as well as from various other authors, whose memories are referred to by Caesar Baronius in the first volume of his annals, by the Bollandists on January 18, February 22, June 29, August 1, and elsewhere. The life of Saint Peter has been extensively treated by Antonio Cesari in the Acts of the Apostles and also in a separate volume, Luigi Cuccagni in three substantial volumes, and many others.

[2] Saint Ambrose, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, book 4.

[3] Saint Ambrose, cited work.

[4] Saint Jerome, Against Jovinian, Chapter 1, 26.

[5] Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 16.

[6] Genesis, Chapter 41.

[7] Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 18.

[8] Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 15.

[9] Saint John Damascene, Homily on the Transfiguration.

[10] Saint John Chrysostom, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.

[11] The transfer of "gate" for "power," thus the sign for what is signified, derives

from the fact that in ancient law and among Eastern peoples, princes and judges generally exercised their legislative and judicial power at the city gates (see III, p. XXII, 2). Moreover, this part of the city was kept in a continuous state of garrison and fortification, so that, once the gates were taken, the rest was easily conquered. Even today, it is said “Ottoman Gate” or “Sublime Gate” to indicate the power of the Turks.

[12] Saint Jerome, Against Jovinian, Chapter 1, 26.

[13] Saint Augustine, On the Unity of the Church.

[14] Saint Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book III, n. 3.

[15] Psalms 68, 108.

[16] Gospel according to John, 14, 12.

[17] See Saint Basil of Seleucia and the Recognitions of Saint Clement.

[18] See Theodoret, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Clement, etc.

[19] Benedict XIV, On the Beatification of the Servants of God, Book I, Chapter I.

[20] Letter to the Romans, Chapter I.

[21] Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book II, Chapter 15.

[22] First Letter of Peter, Chapter 5.

[23] Saint Pacian, Letter 2.

[24] The holy Fathers who recount the story of Simon Magus, among others, are: Saint Maximus of Turin, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Saint Sulpicius Severus, Saint Gregory of Tours, Saint Clement Pope, Saint Basil of Seleucia, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome, and many others.

[25] Lactantius, Book 4.

[26] Epistle 2, Chapter 3.

[27] Scholars’ opinions vary in determining the year of the martyrdom of the Prince

of the Apostles, but the most likely is the one that assigns it to the year 67 of the common era. In fact, Saint Jerome, an indefatigable investigator and knower of sacred things, informs us that Saint Peter and Saint Paul were martyred two years after the death of Seneca, Nero's teacher. Now, from Tacitus, a historian of those times, we know that the consuls under whom Seneca died were Silio Nerva and Attico Vestino, who held the consulship in the year 65. Therefore, the two Apostles suffered martyrdom in 67. This count of years, for which martyrdom is fixed at that time, corresponds to the 25 years and almost two months during which Saint Peter held his See in Rome, a number of years that has always been recognised by all antiquity (see "Historical-Chronological Observations" by Monsignor Domenico Bartolini, Cardinal of the Holy Church: "Whether the year 67 of the common era is the year of the martyrdom of the glorious Princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul," Rome, Tipografia Scalvini, 1866).

[28] The chain with which Saint Peter was bound is still preserved in Rome in the church known as Saint Peter in Chains (Artano, "*Life of Saint Peter*").

[29] On the highest point of the Janiculum Hill, where Ancus Marcius, the fourth king of Rome, founded the Janiculum Fortress, the Church of Saint Peter in Montorio was built, at the place where the holy Apostle completed his martyrdom. This hill was called Janiculum because it was dedicated to Janus, the guardian of the gates, which in Latin are called *ianuae*. It is believed that Janus, who built that part of Rome facing the Capitol, was also buried here. It was also called the Golden Mountain, from the nearby and ancient Aurelia Gate. Now it is called Montorio, or Mount of Gold, from the yellow colour of the earth that covers this hill, one of the seven hills of ancient Rome (see Moroni, "Churches of Saint Peter").

[30] Bollandists, June 29.

[31] Saint Ephrem the Syrian.

[32] See Emanuele Square.

[33] See Saint Gregory the Great, Epistle 30. Baronius in the year 284.

[34] Saint Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book III, Chapter 1.

[35] Caius Romanus in Eusebius; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, book 7; Tertullian, On Persecutions; Origen in Eusebius, book 3; Saint Cyprian, Letter 52 to

Antonian and Letter 55 to Cornelius.

[36] Saint Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, Chapter 1.

[37] Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus, a very knowledgeable man in ecclesiastical history, who died in the year 450, commenting on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, where the Apostle writes: “I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you” (Romans 1,11), adds that Paul did not say he wanted to confirm them except because the great Saint Peter had already first communicated the Gospel to them: “Because Peter first gave them the evangelical doctrine, he necessarily added ‘to confirm you'” (Commentary on the Letter to the Romans).

[38] 1 Corinthians 11:23-24; Galatians 1:17-18.

[39] See Theophany.

[40] Jewish Antiquities, Book 20, Chapter 5.

[41] In Eusebius, Book II, 14.

[42] Saint Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*.

[43] Revelation 17:5; 18:2.

[44] See Saint Jerome, *On Illustrious Men*, Chapter 8.

[45] Tertullian, *On the Prescription of Heretics*, Chapter 36.