

Szent Péter apostol székhogalása (február 22) Sajnos, nincs magyar fordítás! / Homily for the feast of the Chair of St. Peter (22 February)

(1Pt5:1-4; Mt16:13-19) In the gospel for today's feast of St. Peter's Chair, Christ promised the Keys of Heaven's Kingdom to Simon Peter, the Rock upon whom He would build His Church. In his first letter, however, this same apostle exhorts pastors to "be examples to the flock" – drawing them in effect by holiness of life rather than compelling them with commands. Here we have two complementary models of authority: hierarchy and holiness. Although both originate from one and the same God, one arises visibly from without, the other invisibly from within. When appraising someone's authority in the Church militant, hierarchy trumps holiness – but holiness isn't by any means inferior. Many virtuous men – including St. Norbert and St. Augustine – avoided the authority conferred by higher orders, while ardently seeking the authority born of personal holiness. St. Peter showed great deference at the ecumenical council over which he presided in Jerusalem. In doing so, he was merely following in his Master's footsteps. Jesus showed unfathomable deference. He didn't forcefully oblige us by His absolute transcendence as the God of glory. Instead, He gently won us over by His absolute humility as the man of sorrows.

Hierarchical rank obliges followers to serve their master whereas personal holiness urges the master to serve his followers. Jesus said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant." (Mt23:11) For this reason, the pope is known in the Church as the Servant of the Servants of God. Peter warns pastors not to tend the flock for shameful profit thereby reminding pastors to seek holiness more ardently than worldlings seek riches and honor. Holiness in turn is born of grace. During a dramatic conversion experience, the flames of grace engulf our parched soul, but God usually dispenses His grace almost imperceptibly as smoldering twigs of devotion. We in turn must fan these glowing embers into a flame, which we then protect from the winds of dissipation. Devotion is kindling for the ardent fire of holiness. Let's examine a few ways that we can prevent our devotion from being snuffed out.

"If a tiny spark of God's love already burns within you," says St. Charles Borromeo, "do not expose it to the wind, for it may get blown out. Keep the stove tightly shut... In other words, avoid distractions as well as you can. Stay quiet with God. Do not spend your time in useless chatter." I would add that during common prayers, we should take care to blend in. Other things being equal, however, a good rule of thumb for prayer says: slower is better. This is especially true of the supreme prayer, the holy mass. By racing through our prayers, we treat as profane something that is sacred. Another devotion dampener is not making a thanksgiving after receiving our Lord's Sacred Body and Blood. Recollecting ourselves before Holy Mass begins is a golden opportunity that many neglect. While our internal recollection of soul is paramount, external devotion of body is by no means superfluous. So let's avoid making sloppy genuflections no matter how many times we bend the knee each day. If familiarity breeds contempt, reverence enkindles devotion, which will one day blaze into sanctity. Amen!