

Lesson 12

The Pope: Leader of the Church

Vocabulary

cardinal: A high official of the Catholic Church who is appointed by the Pope to advise him. When a Pope dies, the cardinals elect a new Pope from among themselves.

Vatican City: An independent state in Rome, Italy, where the Pope lives. Its population of about one thousand is governed by the Pope. Vatican City contains the papal residence, St. Peter's Basilica, and other important buildings.

conclave: A private meeting of the cardinals to elect a Pope.

successor: One who comes after another in a job or office.

Vatican Council II: A series of meetings of the bishops from all over the world. The meetings were held during 1962 to 1965, in Vatican City. The Council was called by Pope John XXIII.

ecumenism: The effort to promote unity among all Christians.

Concepts of Faith

Who is the Pope?

The successor of Saint Peter and the leader of the Catholic Church.

Peter Is Chosen

Jesus knew that He would return to His Father in heaven, so He wanted to leave someone to lead and guide His Church after He ascended into heaven. Peter was chosen to be the first leader of the Church. He was the first Pope. The Bible tells us what Jesus wanted Peter to do. After His Resurrection and before His Ascension, Jesus was having breakfast with His disciples. When they had finished, Jesus said to Peter,

“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus asked Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” Jesus for the third time asked, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter became upset and replied, “Lord, you know

everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to Peter, “Feed my sheep.”

—based on John 21:15–17

Jesus asked Peter to tend and feed His sheep. Jesus wanted Peter and all Peter’s successors to tend Jesus’ sheep. We are the sheep of His flock. Jesus was asking Peter and his successors to care for us and teach us about God and about ourselves as images of God. Peter and all the Popes since him have carried on this mission. Today, Catholics all over the world are guided by the leadership of the Pope. The Pope is called the “Holy Father”, because he cares for all people like a loving father.

Choosing a Pope

The usual way a person becomes Pope is through election. Men called cardinals take part in the selection of a new Pope. A cardinal is a high official of the Church who is appointed by the Pope to advise him. As a sign of their office, cardinals wear red robes and hats. When a Pope dies, cardinals from all over the world come together to choose a new Pope. They meet in Vatican City, which is located in Rome, Italy. Vatican City is governed by the Pope, with a population of about one thousand. The Pope lives in Vatican City, which is also the site of St. Peter’s Basilica. When the cardinals meet to choose a Pope, they gather in a private meeting called a conclave. The cardinals remain in the Vatican until the Pope is chosen.

Before the election and during the election process, the whole Church prays and asks the Holy Spirit to guide the cardinals in their selection of a Pope. When they meet to elect a Pope, the cardinals gather twice each day in the Sistine Chapel and by secret ballot vote for who they think should be Pope. In order for a man to be elected Pope, two thirds of the cardinals, plus one other cardinal, must vote for him. After each vote, the ballots are burned in a small stove. The smoke from the ballots can be seen by the people outside the Vatican. If a Pope has not been elected, damp straw is added to the burning ballots so the smoke is black. This tells the world that a Pope has not been elected. If a Pope has been elected, the ballots are burned by themselves, so the smoke is white. When white smoke rises from the Sistine Chapel, cheers can be heard, because a successor to Peter has been chosen.

Shortly after the white smoke has been seen, the new Pope arrives on the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica. He is presented to the people by a cardinal who in Latin says: “I bring you news of great joy; we have a Pope.” The name of the man chosen to be Pope is given first, and then the name he will use as Pope is given. For many centuries each pope has chosen a name different from his baptismal name. For example, many Popes have chosen the name John. A modern-day Pope who chose the name John was Pope John XXIII. This means that twenty-two Popes before him chose the name of John.

There are many interesting facts about the Pope. One of the symbols of the Pope is keys. These keys are a symbol of the authority that Jesus gave Peter as the first Pope.

Peter was to open the way to heaven for people by his teaching, his leadership, and his celebration of the sacraments. As we read in the Bible, Jesus said to Peter: “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to 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” (Mt 16:18–19).

For many centuries, when the Pope was elected, he was crowned with a tiara, or crown. The crown was a symbol showing that the Pope was like a king here on earth. Pope Paul VI was the last Pope to be crowned with a tiara. The tiara was very

expensive. Pope Paul VI’s tiara was purchased by the American bishops and is on display in the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. The money used to buy the crown was sent to Mother Teresa at her mission in Calcutta, India.

The Pope usually wears white. On his head he wears a small, white skull cap. During liturgical celebrations, the Pope wears an ornate headdress made of silk or linen, called a miter. The miter is made of two stiff pieces of fabric and usually has two fringed lappets on either side that hang down the back. He has special vestments that he alone may wear.



Recent Popes

There have been many Popes. We are going to read about four of the more recent Popes.

Pope John XXIII

One of the most beloved Popes of recent times was Pope John XXIII. Pope John XXIII was seventy-seven years old when he was elected Pope in 1958. He has been described as very intelligent, with a warm sense of humor. One of the most memorable events of his papacy is Vatican Council II. This Council was a series of meetings that took place between the years 1962 and 1965. Pope John invited bishops from all over the world to meet at the Vatican. The Council has affected the lives of Catholics all over the world. The Council made some changes in Church practices. The language that the priest used in celebrating the Mass was changed. Before Vatican II, the Mass was celebrated in Latin in most of the Catholic churches in the world. However, the bishops of the Council

permitted the priests to use the language of the people at Mass. In the United States, the prayers of the Mass are now most often said in English.

The Council also taught many important things. It taught about the Catholic Church's relationship with other churches and peoples, about the sacraments, about the Bible, and about the Church. For example, it taught that the Church was founded by Jesus, and that the Church carries on the mission of Christ. The Church does this by teaching the truth, celebrating the sacraments, and providing leadership for people by helping them to act lovingly in all they say and do.

Ecumenism was important during Pope John's papacy. Ecumenism is the effort to promote unity among all Christians. Catholics should make an effort to understand the beliefs of other Christians. Catholics also should respect the beliefs of non-Christian religions. Working together with people of different faiths can help to make a more peaceful and unified world.

Pope John XXIII died in 1963. When he died, he was mourned by Catholics everywhere, because he was the leader of the Church. His death was also mourned by non-Catholics around the world, because of the great respect and love he earned while he was alive.

Pope Paul VI

The next Pope was Pope Paul VI. It is said that he was a very mild and gentle man. When he became Pope, he had a very difficult job ahead of him. The Vatican Council was still in progress, and, instead of ending the Council, he decided to continue the meetings. Then he had to make sure that the decisions of the Council were carried out in Catholic churches all over the world. Following the decisions of the Council was a difficult thing for some people. Pope Paul VI guided the Church through these difficult times. Pope Paul VI died in August 1978.

Pope John Paul I

Pope John Paul I was the next Pope. He chose the two names John and Paul because of his great respect for the two Popes before him. When Pope John Paul was installed as Pope, he refused to be crowned with the tiara. However, as all Popes do, he accepted a woolen garment called a pallium, which is worn around the neck. This is a symbol of the unity of all the bishops with the Pope. Pope John Paul I had a very short reign as Pope. He died in 1978 after 33 days as Pope. He is remembered as a kind and gentle leader.

Pope John Paul II

On October 16, 1978, Pope John Paul II was elected. For many centuries, only Italians had been elected Pope, so Pope John Paul II made history as the first Polish Pope. There was great surprise that the new Pope was not Italian. But there was also great joy that a new Pope had been elected.

Pope John Paul II has a very interesting history. His name was Karol Wojtyla, and he was born in a small town called Wadowice, in Poland, on May 18, 1920. He came