

January 2008 Monthly G.R.A.C.E.

Catechetical Area: Church/Church History in Light of Vatican II

Catechetical Topic: Church Authority

Event Focusing On: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Session for Adults:

Half of the church seating remains. Other half put into pods with 3-legged tables, bible, pencils.

1. 35 minutes, intro to church authority. Begin on side with seats in rows: (6:25-7:10)

Intro: Authority: always a necessary part of any human structure—family, community, organizations, business, the Church—but for the Church need to constantly look at Jesus—his authority, how he exercised authority, what he expected for his disciples. Jesus knew that for unity in teaching and solidarity in practice some authority structure had to be in place. He focused on the apostles—apostolic authority—and left the details for the Church to develop over time. Some things became permanent marks of Church structure, some things develop and continue to develop. For us as Catholics we look to the Second Vatican Council from 45 years ago as the most recent and most authoritative attempt to help us understand Church authority.

Vatican II took place from 1962-1965 at a time that the world was rapidly changing and when the Church had not changed significantly in any way it lived or taught for over 400 years. It was called by Pope John XXIII, who knew he had the authority to make the changes he wanted but instead called together all the bishops of the world, for he knew that authentic authority was not a matter of exercising power but shaping the Church as the Spirit of Jesus would.

Let's look at a brief clip connected to this Church-changing event as a way to launch our discussion / learning on Church authority today.

- **a 13 minute clip on Vatican II;**

[Synopsis of the video clip: Title “The Faithful Revolution” gives hint to use of authority by bishops and people. The subtitle of “Genius of the Heart” gives us a hint into the type of person Pope John the XXIII was not only was he the leader of the Catholic Church, he was also a loving, kind, charismatic person, wanting to have a relationship with those he was in authority with. Vatican II was to open the doors, to update the church stance on certain issues. Period of passing on of power was present in society as well. Church read the signs of the times and through wisdom of Pope John XXIII opened the windows of the Vatican for fresh ideas and suggestions to leadership of church.]

After video clip, have them respond to this question **with someone around them:**

--What images struck you (old and new)?

--Any insights or questions surface concerning church authority?

After general discussion, have them **move into pods** to discuss these questions:

- **discussing with partner (someone near them) 2 questions:**

- *How do you understand church authority?*

- *What issues do you have concerning church authority?*

2. 15 min / Debrief and give input on models of Church authority. (7:10-7:25)

a) **The Church is structured more like an interlocking or interconnected set of circles than a pyramid.**

b) Bishops are not branch managers of a central office (for example, like the structure of a bank) but equally with the pope successors to the apostles.

c) Hierarchical structure does not exist for its own sake but to serve the unity/communion of the Church.

Areas to touch upon:

- Vatican and its structure of curial offices
- how bishops are selected
- the difference between Catholic and Orthodox churches
- the importance of baptism as the fundamental, defining sacrament

Examples: The Vatican's statements on care for people in persistent vegetative states and how it evolved through give/take of pastoral reality

--or Benedict XVI's motu proprio allowing priests universally to offer the old Tridentine celebration of Eucharist and the sacraments at their own discretion

Further questions/discussion

Break (7:25-7:30)

3. 15 min (10 on passage/questions, 5 on group responses) on Jesus passages showing use/and response to authority. Passages marked in Bibles on tables. (7:30-7:45)

- Luke 2:41-52 (child Jesus in the temple)
- Luke 4:31-37 (Cure of Demoniac),
- Mark 11:27-33 (The authority of Jesus questioned)
- Luke 5:24-26 (authority to heal and forgive sins)
- Matt 7:24-29 (The two foundations)
- Luke 22:39-44 (agony in garden)
- Matthew 16:15-20 (Upon this rock I will build...)
- Each group gets a passage and discusses passage in light of these questions:
 - What is the image of authority in this passage?*
 - How does it apply to the Church?*
 - How does it apply to your daily life?*

4. After discussion on scripture questions, give about 10 Minutes on responding to these 2 questions in their pods: (7:45-7:55)

- *What do you think is meant by the words "the infallible teaching of the church?"* Discussion: How the church sees its authority in regards to infallible /non-infallible teaching?

Infallibility:

a) The Church is infallible when it comes to defining something essential to faith or morals. We believe the Holy Spirit guides us without error. We share this with most other Christian churches, though they don't use the word "infallibility" but talk about "indefectibility". As Catholics, however, we believe God has given us definite structures to make this happen. When we talk about how this process works, we get into the talk on infallibility. But even here, important to emphasize that the phrase "The Pope is infallible" is not correct unless understood in very nuanced ways.

b) Three ways Catholics believe the Holy Spirit can guide the Church infallibly

1) the ordinary, universal teaching on essential matters (Jesus died for our sins; the direct taking of innocent life is morally wrong, etc.). There has been no solemn definition of these by the pope or council yet they are part of the core of our faith and held to be infallibly true.

2) The extraordinary guidance of an ecumenical council that represents the universal church gathered for wisdom (e.g. Jesus is both human and divine; God is properly understood as one God, three persons, etc.). These deepening understanding of how to name and correctly understand who Jesus is and who God is are part of the Church's core teaching and held to be infallible via the work of key early ecumenical councils.

3) The extraordinary act of the pope, on something essential to faith or morals, acting not simply as bishop of Rome but as the successor of Peter for the whole Church, defining something that is true and has the authentic tradition of the Church behind it, to be held infallibly by the faith of the Church.

Notice: that means most of what the pope says/writes has nothing to do with infallible authority but rather with non-infallible. Also, that means that in many ways the issue of infallibility is a side issue. The more important question is how to be open to the authoritative, non-infallible teaching authority? What happens if we have questions/disagreements with that authority? How do we both live out our personal baptismal call and yet open selves to listening to/obeying that authority?

Discussion.

- *What images / concepts/concerns come to mind when you hear the word magisterium?*

Other questions/discussion?

5. 10 minutes wrap-up (7:55-8:05)

- Respond to above questions any other questions or concerns
- Reading of passage of Jesus' baptism (**Matthew 3: 13-17**) followed by 1 minute homily:

Even though the Church has come to some specific structures within its history, it is always the model of Jesus that must be kept in mind. Authority structures serve the mission of the Church, no vice-versa. Given that, look at Jesus' baptism. In that foundational event of his life we see why he both could be obedient to authority and how he would then exercise authority. Knowing himself as the beloved Son of God, allowed him to go into the desert and face the trials there, to begin an itinerant life and face the challenges of the authorities, to use his authority to heal and confront evil, to not use physical power to protect himself, to be obedient to God's will even when it was leading him toward death. To know ourselves as the beloved son or daughter of God—that is the meaning of baptism—we celebrate on this coming weekend at the feast of the baptism of the Lord. When do we need to let authority guide us and respectfully listen to authority so to be that beloved son/daughter of God? When we exercise authority as parents, friends, co-workers, pastoral people, etc., do we have in mind that the people we are dealing with are God's beloved? If so, we are likely to both accept authority properly and exercise it suitably. If not we might resist authority or exercise it out of power. Using the baptism of Jesus as our inspiration, Let's take a couple of minutes to think about the following

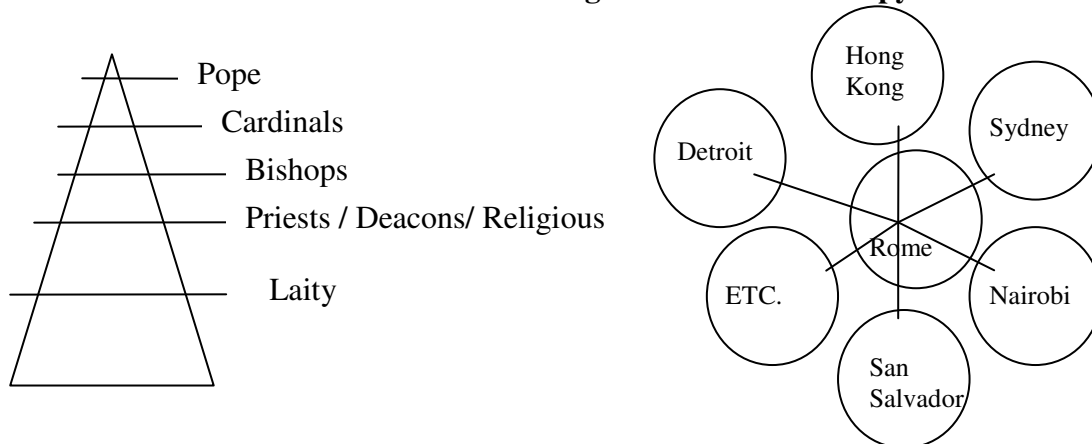
6. 3 minutes quiet personal thinking about...(8:05-8:08)

- **How do we learn to see church authority through eyes of a faithful believer in Jesus?**
- **Where in my life do I need to respond to church authority in a healthier way?**

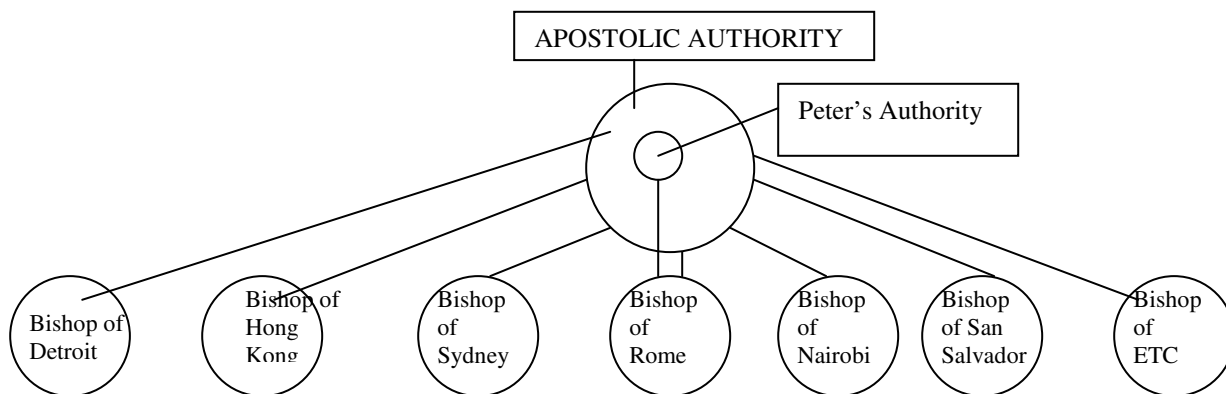
....During this time hand out questions for their work with families or other adults and evaluation slips.

THE CHURCH'S STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY:

1) The Church is structured more like an interlocking set of circles than a pyramid.



2) Bishops are not branch managers of a central office (for example, like the structure of a bank) but equally with the pope successors to the apostles.



INFALLIBILITY

1) Infallibility is most properly attributed to the Church as a whole. To say that “The Pope is infallible” needs to be understood within this wider understanding of infallibility.

2) Three ways we see as Catholics that the Holy Spirit guides infallibility:

- a) The ordinary, universal teaching of the Church through the ages on essential matters of faith / morals (“Jesus died for our sins;” “direct, intentional killing of an innocent person is morally wrong,” etc.)
- b) The extraordinary universal gathering of the bishops of the Church in ecumenical council (“Jesus has two natures: human and divine;” “God is always only one God but properly talked about as three distinct persons,” etc.)
- c) The extraordinary action of a pope, acting in his role as universal teacher, teaching on some matter essential to faith/morals, invoking the charism of infallibility, holds a true teaching to be infallibly true (“Mary shares with Christ her final resurrected state”).