

POPE LEO'S SERMON ON THE PETRINE SUCCESSION, MID-5TH CENTURY

Pope Leo I held the office of pope from 440 to 461, and as such, is usually considered to be the first pope of the church. He met with Attila in 452 in an effort to dissuade Attila from sacking Rome.

For when, as has been read in the Gospel lesson, the Lord had asked the disciples whom they believed Him to be amid the various opinions that were held, and the blessed Peter had replied, saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," the Lord said "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father, which is in heaven.

"And I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." [Matt. xvi. 16–19.].

The dispensation of Truth therefore abides, and the blessed Peter persevering in the strength of the Rock, which he has received, has not abandoned the helm of the Church, which he undertook. For he was ordained before the rest in such a way that from his being called the Rock, from his being pronounced the Foundation, from his being constituted the Doorkeeper of the kingdom of heaven, from his being set as the Umpire to bind and to loose, whose judgments shall retain their validity in heaven—from all these mystical titles we might know the nature of his association with Christ. And still to-day he more fully and effectually performs what is intrusted to him, and carries out every part of his duty and charge in Him and with Him, through whom he has been glorified. And so if anything is rightly done and rightly decreed by us, if anything is won from the mercy of God by our daily supplications, it is of his work and merits whose power lives and whose authority prevails in his See. . . .

And so, dearly beloved, with becoming obedience we celebrate today's festival by such methods, that in my humble person he may be recognized and honored, in whom abides the care of all the shepherds, together with the charge of the sheep commended to him, and whose dignity is not belittled even in so unworthy an heir. And hence the presence of my venerable brothers and fellow-priests, so much desired and representative valued by me, will be the more sacred and precious, if they will transfer the chief honor of this service in which they have deigned to take part to him whom they know to be not only the patron of this see, but also the primate of all bishops. When therefore we utter our

exhortations in your ears, holy brethren, believe that he is speaking whose representative we are. Because it is his warning that we give, and nothing else but his teaching that we preach, beseeching you to “gird up the loins of your mind,” and lead a chaste and sober life in the fear of God, and not to let your mind forget his supremacy and consent to the lusts of the flesh.

Short and fleeting are the joys of this world’s pleasures which endeavor to turn aside from the path of life those who are called to eternity. The faithful and religious spirit, therefore, must desire the things which are heavenly and, being eager for the divine promises, lift itself to the love of the incorruptible Good and the hope of the true Light. But be assured, dearly beloved, that your labor, whereby you resist vices and fight against carnal desires, is pleasing and precious in God’s sight, and in God’s mercy will profit not only yourselves but me also, because the zealous pastor makes his boast of the progress of the Lord’s flock. “For ye are my crown and joy,” as the Apostle says, if your faith, which from the beginning of the Gospel has been preached in all the world, has continued in love and holiness. For though the whole Church, which is in all the world, ought to abound in all virtues, yet you especially, above all people, it becomes to excel in deeds of piety, because, founded as you are on the very citadel of the Apostolic Rock, not only has our Lord Jesus Christ redeemed you in common with all men, but the blessed Apostle Peter has instructed you far beyond all men.

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Frederick Austin Ogg, *A Sourcebook of Medieval History: Documents Illustrative of European Life and Institutions From the German Invasions to the Renaissance* (New York: American Book Company, 1907), pp. 80–83.