

April 2008

Dearly Beloved in Christ,

Throughout the history of salvation, God has raised up individuals to lead His people. Christ assigned a special role of leadership to St. Peter. After Christ's name, it is Peter's name that appears with the greatest frequency in the New Testament.

The testimony of Early Christian writers and the witness of the martyrs demonstrate that the Pope's role has always been a crucial part of God's plan for the Church. Jesus said the words to Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." It was Jesus who gave Simon the new name, Peter, meaning the Rock. Jesus also bestows on Peter the power to forgive sin and to loose and bind on heaven and on earth.

To me one of the most moving experiences of my life has been to visit the tomb of St. Peter under the Basilica of St. Peter on the Vatican Hill. St. Jerome says that Peter was Bishop of Rome for twenty-five years until his martyrdom by Nero. Peter was nailed to the cross upside down because he insisted that he was not worthy to die as Christ did.

The New Testament does not hide Peter's human weakness, but the Acts of the Apostles describes Peter as he boldly proclaims Christ's resurrection, announces the Gospel message and leads the young Church in face of so many challenges. Guided by the Spirit, Peter chooses a replacement for Judas and carries on the mission that Christ entrusted to him. That mission has continued in the Apostolic Succession handed on from generation to generation by the laying on of hands and the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ has not left us orphans. The Holy Spirit still guides the Church, and makes the ministry of Peter present in every generation. The Pope's ministry is a gift from Christ

that promotes the unity and the Catholicity of our Church with over one billion members in every part of the world.

In the New Testament, St. Luke describes how the early Christians laid their sick by the side of the road so that Peter's shadow might touch them. Catholics throng to where the Pope is for the same reason, to be near the Vicar of Christ. It is the way we express our love for the Lord Jesus, who has given to His Church this ministry of Peter to guide us and to confirm us in the Faith.

I write this letter to ask you to pray for the spiritual success of the Holy Father's visit. At the same time, I urge all my fellow Catholics to listen attentively to the message that the Pope will address to us. The Holy Father is not a celebrity or a rock star. He is a Shepherd and represents Christ, the Good Shepherd, who commanded Peter: "Feed my Sheep." Pope Benedict is coming to feed us in our hunger for God and for truth.

Let us receive our Holy Father with loyalty and affection. May his presence among us help us to grow in our love for Christ and for one another. May his words renew us in our commitment to be faithful disciples in Christ's Church.

Assuring you of my prayers and pastoral love, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sean P. O'Malley". The signature is written in black ink and includes a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Archbishop of Boston