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Faith Formation

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The Face of Christ

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“The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the ‘rock’ of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock. The office of binding and losing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head. This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church’s very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.” (CCC 881)

These are exciting and grace-filled days as we, this parish, this Archdiocese and our Country prepares diligently for the arrival of Pope Benedict XVI. Let us prepare our own hearts for the Pope’s visit because he comes as the successor of Peter. And he comes to build up the Church founded by Jesus Christ. It was to Peter whom Jesus gave the command to “feed his lambs.” (John 21:16). It is the saving Word of God and the Eucharist (the Body and Blood of Christ) that the Pope will nourish us with as one who is truly the successor of the first Apostle Peter.

St. Clement of Rome (the first Successor of St. Peter) taught: “The Apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; **Jesus Christ was sent by God. Christ, therefore, was sent forth by God, and the Apostles by Christ.**” This “chain of

service”, as Pope Benedict XVI calls it, “has continued until today; it will continue to the end of the world.” Jesus sent forth the Apostles. This sending forth to preach and teach the Good



News of Christ has continued down through the ages...passed on by Christ, to the Apostles to their successors (the Bishops).

Just a few weeks ago during Holy Week and Easter we were reminded that Jesus Christ lived and died for us that we might have life. We remember that the events of Christ’s life are truly present with us and recall the “nearness of our God” in Jesus who become one of us in all things except sin. In understanding the commission that Je-

sus gave to the first Apostles, and subsequently to their successors, we discover that this too is yet another way Jesus is present to us here and now.

Jesus commissions the Apostles, sends them forth with these words: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mat 28:17-20). Through the preaching, teaching, baptizing and prophetic mission of the Apostles and their successors we are guaranteed the closeness of the Lord just as he promised: “**I am with you always, to the close of the age**”.

Pope Benedict teaches that we too have a personal experience of the

Risen Lord. Through this apostolic ministry “it is Christ himself who reaches those who are called to the faith. **The distance of the centuries is overcome and the Risen One offers himself alive and active for our sake, in the Church and in the world today.**” (Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, May 3, 2006) Our reality is that through this succession, through the teaching that has been handed down from the Father, through Christ to the Apostles, “Christ is not 2,000 years away but is really present among us and gives us the Truth, he gives us the light that makes us live and find the way towards the future.” (General Audience, May 3, 2006).

Jesus, the Son of the Father, inaugurates his Church by preaching the Good News, gathers his 'little flock' which he himself shepherds, chooses the Apostles by name with whom he will share his mission with and hand over the “keys of the Kingdom”. When Jesus established “the Twelve” (Mk 3:14), he looked both back in time and forward in time. Jesus chose Twelve as a sign of the Old Covenant with Israel. Pope Benedict teaches: “With their very own existence, the Twelve—called from different backgrounds—become an appeal for all of Israel to convert and allow herself to be gathered into the new covenant, complete and perfect fulfillment of the ancient one.” (Pope Benedict, *The Apostles*, pg. 12) Through several key and intentional events and actions, Jesus sets the Apostles as head of his Church on earth, entrusting them with authority and mission. At the Last Supper, celebrated with his Apostles, he entrusted the duty to “do this in remembrance of me” by which he establishes both the gift and sacraments of the priesthood and the Eucharist. Pope Benedict writes: “In a certain sense we can say that the Last Supper itself is the act of foundation of the Church, because he gives himself and thus creates a new community, a community united in communion with himself.” (*Apostles*, pg. 12) **The Church therefore is the community established by Jesus Christ, her Head that we may have communion (union with) Him and in which we work out our salvation with the graces given in and through the Church.** The



Risen Christ, enters the Upper Room and breaths on the Apostles and confers on them the power to forgive sins (the Sacrament of Reconciliation). (cf. John 20:23) In the letter to the Ephesians says of the Church, it is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” (Eph 2:20)

Having looked **back in time** (Israel and the twelve tribes), **forward in time** (the establishment of the new covenant and the community gathered around his Eucharistic presence), **Jesus also looks into eternity**, the fulfillment of the Covenant. The Book of Revelation presents the “heavenly Jerusalem as a city whose walls ‘had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.’” (Rev. 21:14) (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, March 22, 2006). It is Jesus’ plan that we see his face as reflected on the face of the Church (remembering the Church is both human and divine). It is from the Apostles, through their word and witness that Jesus reveals the Truth, fulfills his mission, and remains present throughout the ages and into eternity, “when God will be all in all.” (Rev. 14:21)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: “For it was from the side of Christ as he slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth the ‘wondrous sacrament of the whole Church’. As Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam’s side, so the Church was born from the pierced heart of Christ’s hanging dead on the cross.” (CCC 766) The Church, the Apostles gathered with Mary (the New Eve, the Mother of the Church), huddled together in the Upper Room prays for nine days (perhaps the first Novena!) for the coming of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the Church (in the person of Peter) bursts forth from the Upper Room proclaiming the Kingdom of God and fulfilling the mandate given to “make disciples of all nations and baptize them...” Christ, sent by the Father, sends the Apostles into the world. The Church is born.

Today, in our city, the mission continues...Christ in Peter comes to visit His Church! Let us welcome the successor of Peter with hearts full of love and respect. As the representative of Christ on earth, Pope Benedict echoes a message of hope and peace. Let the fire of the New Pentecost fall on us so we the Body of Christ will work together with a renewed and generous spirit to build a civilization of love.