

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Jim's Notes for October 18, 2006 The Gospel According to St. Matthew 16:13-20

Tertullian of Carthage (AD 160-225)

Was anything withheld from the knowledge of Peter, who is called 'the rock on which the Church would be built' (Matt. 16:18) with the power of 'loosing and binding in heaven and on earth' (Matt. 16:19)? (*Demurrer Against the Heretics* 22 (AD 200))

Tertullian of Carthage (AD 160-225)

I now inquire into your opinion, to see whence you usurp this right for the Church. Do you presume, because the Lord said to Peter, "On this rock I will build my Church, I have given you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19a) or "whatever you shall have bound or loosed on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19b) that the power of binding and loosing has thereby been handed on to you, that is, to every church akin to Peter? What kind of man are you, subverting and changing what was the manifest intent of the Lord when he conferred this personally upon Peter? Upon you, he says, I will build my Church; and I will give to you the keys, not to the Church; and whatever you shall have bound or you shall have loosed, not what they shall have bound or they shall have loosed. (*On Modesty* 21:9-10 (AD 220))

Origin of Alexandria (AD 185-254)

Look at (Peter), the great foundation of the Church, that most solid of rocks, upon whom Christ built the Church (Matt. 16:18). And what does our Lord say to him? "Oh you of little faith," he says, "why do you doubt?" (Matt. 14:31). (*Homilies on Exodus* 5:4 (AD 249)).

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (AD 200-258)

The Lord says to Peter: "I say to you," he says, "that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven" (Matt. 16:18-19). . . . On him he builds his Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep (John 21:17); and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair, and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; but a primacy was given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church? (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4 (AD 251))

St. Ephraim the Syrian (AD 306-373)

(Jesus said:) Simon my follower, I have made you the foundation of the holy Church (Matt. 16:18). I betimes called you Peter, because you will support all its buildings. You are the inspector of those who will build on earth a Church for me. If they should wish to build what is false, you, the foundation, will condemn them. You are the head of the fountain from which my teaching flows; you are the chief of my disciples” (*Homilies* 4:1 (A.D.350)).

Pope St. Damasus I (AD 305-383)

Likewise it is decreed: . . . [W]e have considered that it ought to be announced that although all the Catholic Churches spread abroad through the world comprise one bridal chamber of Christ, nevertheless, the holy Roman Church has been placed at the forefront not by the conciliar decisions of other churches, but has received the primacy by the evangelic voice of our Lord and Savior, who says: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it; and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall have bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall have loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19). The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish nor anything like it. (*The Decree of Damasus* 3 (AD 382))

St. Jerome (AD 347-420)

“But,” you (Jovinian) will say, “it was on Peter that the Church was founded” (Matt. 16:18). Well. . . one among the twelve is chosen to be their head in order to remove any occasion for division. But why was not John (the beloved disciple) chosen?” (*Against Jovinian* 1:26 (AD 393)).

St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan (AD 337-397)

(Christ) made answer: “You are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church. . .” Could he not, then, strengthen the faith of the man to whom, acting on his own authority, he gave the kingdom, whom he called the rock, thereby declaring him to be the foundation of the Church (Matt. 16:18)? (*Of the Christian Faith* 4:5 (AD 380))

St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan (AD 337-397)

It is to Peter that he says: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church” (Matt. 16:18). Where Peter is, there is the Church. And where the Church, no death is there, but life eternal. (*On Twelve Psalms* 40:30 (AD 394))

Pope St. Leo I (AD 400-461)

The Lord says, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood have not revealed it to you, but my Father, who is in heaven. And I say to you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it . . .” (Matt. 16:18). 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 understood. 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 loose, whose judgments shall retain their validity in heaven, from all these mystical titles we might know the nature of his association with Christ. (*Sermons* 3:2-3 (AD 442))

Pope St. Leo I (AD 400-461)

Our Lord Jesus Christ. . . has placed the principal charge on the blessed Peter, chief of all the apostles, and from him as from the head wishes his gifts to flow to all the body, so that anyone who dares to secede from Peter's solid rock may understand that he has no part or lot in the divine mystery. He wished him who had been received into partnership in his undivided unity to be named what he himself was, when he said: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:18), that the building of the eternal temple might rest on Peter's solid rock, strengthening his Church so surely that neither could human rashness assail it nor the gates of hell prevail against it. (*Letters* 10:1 (AD 450))

Pope St. Leo I (AD 400-461)

Since, therefore, the universal Church has become a rock through the building up of that original rock and the first of the apostles, the most blessed Peter, heard the voice of the Lord saying, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:18), who is there who dare assail such impregnable strength unless he be either Antichrist or the devil, who, abiding unconverted in his wickedness, is anxious to sow lies by the vessels of wrath which are suited to his treachery, while under the false name of diligence he pretends to be in search of the truth? (*Letters* 156:2 (AD 458))