

## APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION



According to the Acts of the Apostles, before He ascended into heaven, Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit. In the upper room were the apostles, Mary the mother of Jesus, and other followers. One hundred and twenty persons were present. This coming of the Holy Spirit is known as Pentecost which means “fiftieth day.”

The Jewish day of Pentecost (II Mac. 12:31-32) a name derived from the Greek speaking Jews, fell on the fiftieth day after Passover. (Leviticus 23:16)

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia the traditional festival of Pentecost is “the birthday of the Torah "the time our Law was given" when Israel became a constitutional body and "a distinguished people.”



It is no accident that the birthday of the Church was also on Pentecost, the fiftieth day after the Resurrection of Jesus. Israel was founded on twelve tribes; the Church was founded on twelve apostles. Israel became a body on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, the Church on the 50<sup>th</sup> day. Moses had seventy elders (Exodus 24:9) Jesus had seventy disciples (Luke 10:1).

Moses led the Jewish Church, Peter led the Christian Church. Moses spoke for God through Aaron (Ex 4:10-16, 7:1) Peter spoke for God through the Church. (Matt 16:19)

In the upper room Peter stood up and declared that Judas, who had betrayed Christ and committed suicide, needed to be replaced by someone who had witnessed the resurrection. Peter said this must be done to fulfill the scripture found in the Psalms “His office let another take.”

According to the infallible Word of God the apostles held an office. What kind of office? Interestingly to find the best translation of Acts 1:20 we need to go to the Protestant King James Bible which reads: “Let his bishopric another take.”

As we have seen in the previous topics the New Testament was originally written in Greek and the original Greek version is the “Inspired” text. In Greek the word for “office” or “Bishopric” is “*Episkope*” which means the overseer or presiding officers.

This same Greek word “*Episkope*” is also used in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus.

1 Timothy 3:1 “The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task”

Titus 1:7-11 “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God.”



We can clearly see from scripture that the apostles were the first bishops of the Catholic Church and that other men were appointed to hold, not the position of apostles, but the office of bishop. Therefore, all of the men holding the office of bishop since the time of the Apostles are not themselves called "Apostles" but are called bishops and successors to the Apostles.

Apostolic Tradition tells us that Timothy was a Bishop of the Church. Here St. Paul tells Timothy that he received his gift by the laying on of hands.

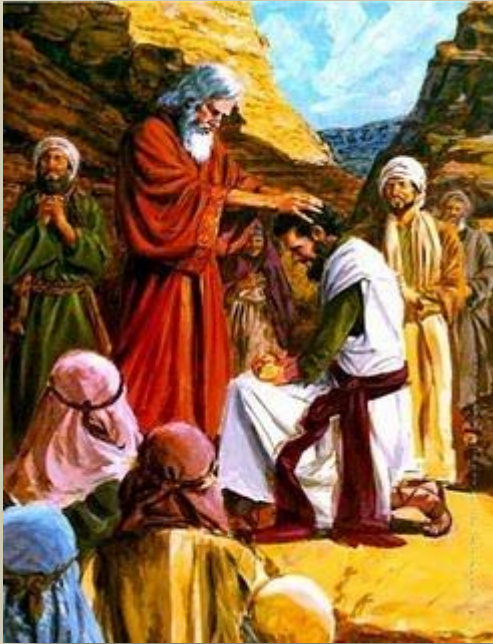
1 Timothy 4:14 "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders **laid their hands upon you.**"

1 Timothy 5:21-22: "I charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to keep these rules without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism. **Do not lay hands too readily on anyone**"

Stephen and Phillip, the first Deacons were also ordained by the laying on of hands. Acts 6:6

Where did the apostles get the idea of the laying on of hands to pass on power and authority?





## Old Testament

Numbers 27:18-20\_“And the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, **and lay your hand upon him**; cause him to stand before Elea'zar the priest and all the congregation, and you shall commission him in their sight. You shall invest him with some of your authority that all the congregation of the people of Israel may obey”.

Deut 34:9 “Now Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom, since Moses had laid his hands upon him; and so the Israelites gave him their obedience, thus carrying out the LORD'S command to Moses.”

## New Testament

As the Church continued to grow the office of bishop became the sign of apostolic authority.

Titus 1:7 For a bishop as God's steward must be blameless, not arrogant, not irritable, not a drunkard, not aggressive, not greedy for sordid gain, holding fast to the true message as taught so that he will be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it”

1 Tim 6:20 “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid profane babbling and the absurdities of so-called knowledge. By professing it, some people have deviated from the faith.”



A priest is ordained a Bishop by Pope Benedict XVI through the laying on of his hands.



## SAINT TIMOTHY BISHOP OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

We know from Tradition that Timothy was a Bishop and we have seen that Paul says that hands were laid upon Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:2 we see four generations of Apostolic Succession

Paul says to Timothy: “So you, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well.”

In this passage Paul refers to the first four generations of apostolic succession-his own generation, Timothy’s generation, the generation Timothy will teach and the generation that they will teach

### Objections to a Visible Church

When discussing Apostolic Succession, a common objection is the existence of a visible Church on earth with a hierarchy. Protestants believe the Church is simply the community of all believers.

**Catholic Answer:** Of course the Church consists of her members. Anyone who is validly baptized belongs to the One Church but according to scripture the Church also had a hierarchy.

In Jeremiah 3:15 there is this prophecy: The Lord says, “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

In John 20: 15-17 Peter alone was told to shepherd and feed the Lord’s sheep. Jesus knew that His sheep would exist in all generations until the end of the world. Jesus also knew that Peter would die. For His sheep to be fed in all generations by Peter, Peter must have successors in every generation.

The Word of God tells us that bishops, the successors of the apostles, would exist until Christ returns.

Peter says to the bishops, “Tend the flock of God that is your charge....and when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.” 1 Peter 5:2-4

Ephesians 3:21 says the Church will be in all generations. “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.”

1 Timothy 3:15 says that the Church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

In the Church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Ephesians 3:11-14

Ephesians 3:9-10 tells us that the wisdom of God was made known to the angels through the Church:

“And to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made know to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.”

Ephesians 2:20 says that the Church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”

In Matthew 13:31 Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven would be like a small mustard seed and it would grow into a large tree. Peter was given the keys to this kingdom of heaven.

Bishops, pastors, teachers, pillar, foundation, structure, a seed growing into a large tree and a holy temple can hardly be considered descriptions of an ‘invisible’ Church.

### Matthew 18:15-20:

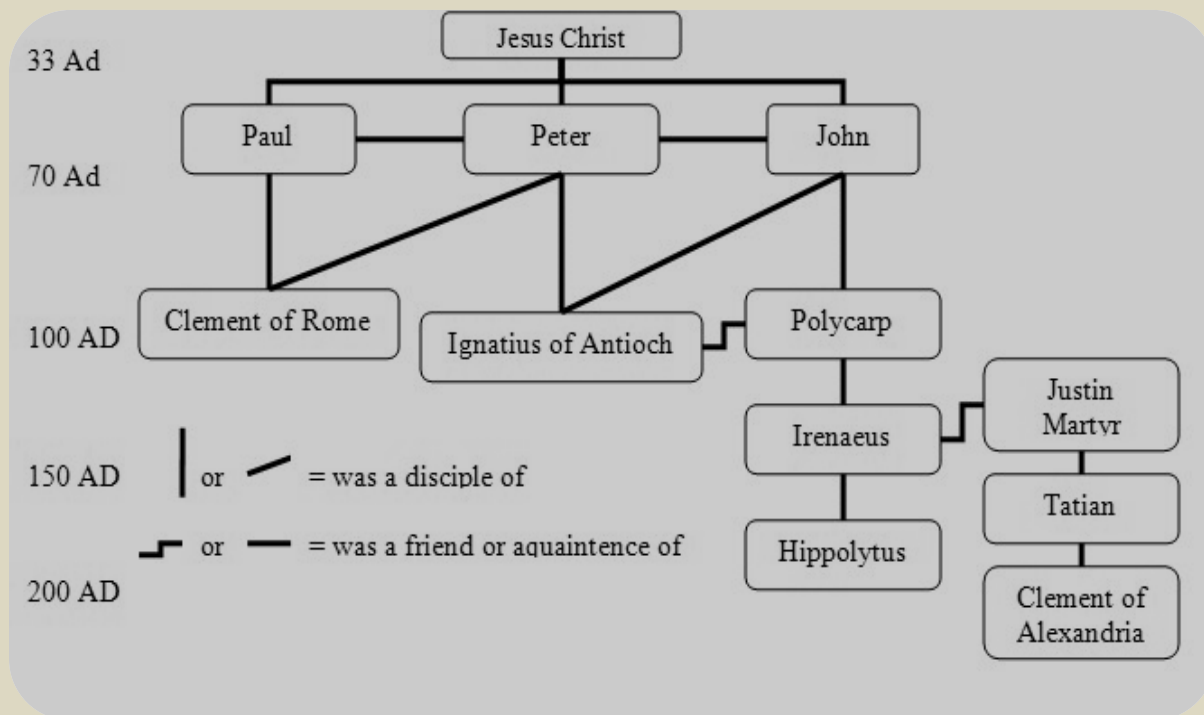
In this passage Jesus says that if a sin is committed between brothers they should try to settle the case. If it cannot be settled they are to “**take it to the church**” and if they refuse to listen “even to the church” they are to be excommunicated. **How is this command of Jesus fulfilled in Protestantism?** This is a great question to ask a Protestant.

If a Baptist (and this happens) accuses a pastor of the Church of Christ of sinning and claims that the latter is not a Christian because he is teaching error and leading people astray in regards to his doctrines on baptism, what "Church" will they take this dispute to in order to settle the issue? According to Jesus in the above passage, there is such a Church and if they refuse to listen to this Church they are to be excommunicated. The Baptist won't let the Church of Christ decide the issue. The Church of Christ pastor won't let the Baptists decide the issue. The Church of Christ won't “take it to” the Zion Bible Church to decide because they agree with the Baptists. The Baptists won't “take it to” the Lutherans to decide because they agree with the Church of Christ.

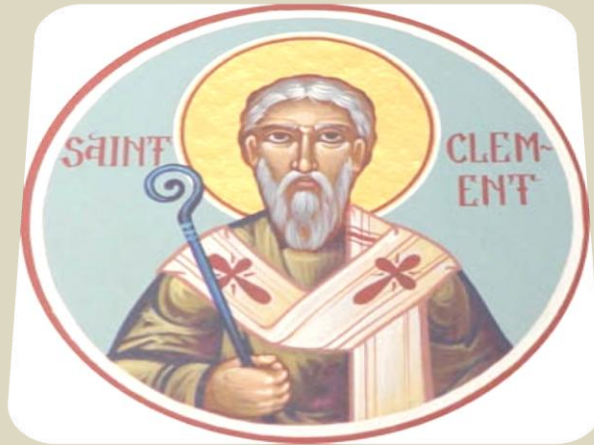
The command of Jesus to “take it to the Church” to settle the issue still stands today. It did not end in the first century. This indicates that Christ established only one authoritative Church with apostolic succession and the authority to bind on earth what is bound in heaven. Jesus established a visible Church He did not establish denominations.

Please take the time to listen to a high energy debate between the Church of Christ and the Baptist Church. The debate highlights the confusion in doctrine when one denies that Christ established a visible teaching apostolic Church. Click on the link [HERE](#)

Since the earliest of writings that we have from bishops, including popes and other men in the early Church, there is an abundance of evidence that those in the early Church acknowledged a visible Church, a hierarchy that exists, and apostolic succession. These men in the Early Church are important resources because of their close connections with the Apostles themselves. Some of these early writers were taught by the Apostles Peter and Paul and John. The following chart shows some of these connections. This is important evidence because these men would have been writing the things that they themselves were taught by the Apostles. There were also then other men within one or two generations of the Apostles as well. All of these men would have continued passing on Sacred Tradition through the bishops in the Church to us today.



From: <http://www.soladeiverbum.com/ecf.shtml>



## SAINT CLEMENT OF ROME

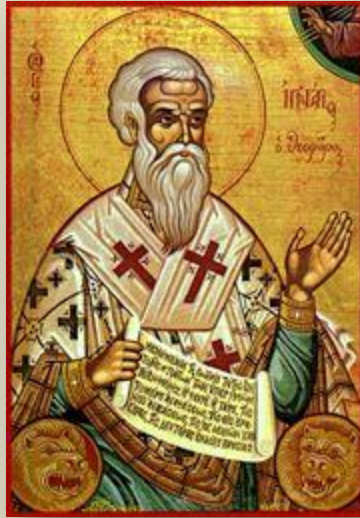
Writing before the year 100 Clement writes on apostolic succession:

“And thus preaching through countries and cities, they (the apostles) appointed the first-fruits of their labors, having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe..... Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those ministers already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry....” *St. Clement, Epistle to the Corinthians*

Did you know?

The word Pope means papa from the Greek pappas-father  
All bishops were called Pope until the fourth century when it began to be a distinctive title of the Bishop of Rome.





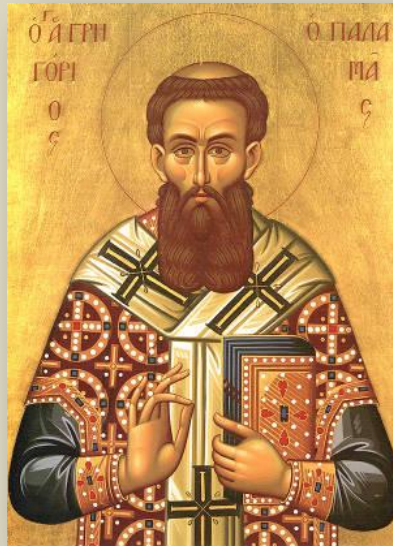
## ST. IGNATIUS BISHOP OF ANTIOCH

Writing in the year 107 Ignatius gives us the first mention of the name Catholic Church.

“See that you follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as you would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is administered either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church” *Letter to the Smyrnaeans, A.D. 107, [8,1]*)

Here Ignatius tells us the early Church had bishops, priests (presbyters) and deacons.

“Since therefore I have, in the persons mentioned, beheld the whole multitude of you in faith and love, I exhort you to study to do all things with a divine harmony, while your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time, and in the end was revealed... Let nothing exist among you that may divide you; but be united with your bishop, and those that preside over you....” *St. Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Magnesians (AD 110):*



### ST. IRENAEUS BISHOP OF LYONS

In AD 180 Irenaeus listed the 12 Popes that had succeeded Peter showing apostolic succession.

“It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times....that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul.... comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops...For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority -- that is, the faithful everywhere -- inasmuch as the Apostolic Tradition has been preserved continuously by those who are everywhere.... The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of **Linus** the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded **Anacletus**; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, **Clement** was allotted the bishopric...To this Clement there succeeded **Evaristus**. **Alexander** followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, **Sixtus** was appointed; after him, **Telephorus**, who was gloriously martyred; then **Hyginus**; after him, **Pius**; then after him, **Anicetus**. **Sorer** having succeeded Anicetus, **Eleutherius** does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.” *Irenaeus Against Heresies 3.3 AD 180*

Did you know?

It is commonly held that 33 of the first 34 Popes were martyred.

### Catechism of the Catholic Church:

**77** "In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them their own position of teaching authority." Indeed, "the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time."

### Addition resources to go deeper into the current topic:

Books----- *Upon This Rock* by Steve Ray

*Jesus, Peter and the Keys* by Scott Butler/Dahlgren/Hess

*Faith of Our Fathers* by James Cardinal Gibbons

Websites-----<http://scripturecatholic.com/>

<http://www.catholic.com//>

For more on Peter and the Keys you can download this debate for \$6.75 between Catholic Apologists Robert Sungenis and Scott Butler and Protestant Apologists James White and Rob ZIns. Four hours of intense debating.

Click [HERE](#) for Alpha Omega Ministries

**Note:** This is a Protestant website.

**Next Topic: Peter is rebuked by Paul**