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by St. Alphonsus Liguori, 1767

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It is proven that the Roman Pontiffs are successors of St. Peter with the same authority that was granted to St. Peter.

1. Jesus Christ founded His Church so that it would endure until the end of Ages; and therefore He promised that until the end He would not abandon it. *Ego vobiscum sum usque ad consummationem seculi. Matth. 28. 20.* But this promise of His would have been vain, and He would have poorly provided for His Church, if He had not arranged that the supreme authority given to St. Peter as visible Head of His Church, necessary for its good governance as we have seen above, would also be transferred to his successors, rather than terminating with the life of St. Peter. *Privilegia istius Sedis* (wrote Nicholas I to Emperor Michael) *perpetua sunt, divinitus radicata, atque plantata; trahi possunt, evelli non possunt. Quæ ante imperium vestrum fuerunt, permanent, Deo gratias; & quousque Christianum nomen prædicatum fuerit, illa subsistere non cessabunt.* Hence the General Council of Constance said (Act. 1.) that when doubts arise concerning Christian Dogmas, there exists a certain rule for finding the truth, by taking the oracle from that Church where

the Apostolic Succession is preserved, since there certainly the true Apostolic Doctrine is also preserved.

2. The Lord already declared that the gates of Hell would never prevail against the Church founded upon the Rock, which was Peter; but they would have prevailed long ago if this promise of the Redeemer had not been fulfilled also upon the successors of Peter. But we must not doubt this, says St. Optatus of Milevis, since St. Peter received from Jesus Christ the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, not only for himself, but for all the Pontiffs his Successors: *Beatus Petrus praeferri omnibus Apostolis meruit, & claves Regni caelorum communicandas ceteris solus accepit. S. Opt. vide l. 2. cont. Parmen.*

3. Therefore God has given the rule to recognize the true Church, namely that which has a Head who descends through legitimate succession from the Apostle St. Peter. Behold how the Holy Fathers describe the true Church of Jesus Christ: *Ea quae habet ab Apostolis traditionem, & adnunciatam omnibus Fidem per successiones Episcoporum pervenientem usque ad nos*; thus St. Irenaeus *lib. 3. cap. 3.* And the same is said by St. Ambrose *Orat. in satyr.* and St. Jerome *lib. 1. Apol. adv. Rufin.* Let us hear St. Optatus of Milevis (*lib. 2. contra Parmenian.*) who declares this with greater distinction: *Negare non potes* (he says to Parmenian) *scire te in Urbe Romae Petro primo Cathedram Episcopalem esse collatam, in qua sedarit omnium Apostolorum Caput Petrus. Petro successit Linus, Lino Clemens &c.* St. Athanasius (*Epist. ad Marcum Papam*): *Optamus, ut a Vestre S. Sedis Ecclesiae auctoritate, quae est Mater, & Caput omnium Ecclesiarum ad correptionem, & recreationem Fidelium percipere &c.* What consolation for us, wrote Bishop Bossuet, to be able to ascend from the present Pontiff back to St. Peter established by Jesus Christ! Let us hear also what the Emperor Valentinian wrote to Theodosius: *Beatissimus Romanæ Civitatis Episcopus, cui Principatum Sacerdotii super omnes Antiquitas contulit, locum habeat de Fide, & Sacerdotibus judicandi. Apud præambul. Conc. Chalced.* And previously Constantine the Great said, as is found in the Acts of the Nicene Council: *Roma Principatum Sacerdotum, & Religionis Caput ab Imperatore Cælefti confitutum effe.*

4. But let us now hear what the Councils say, and the concept they have of the Apostolic See. In the Fourth Constantinople Council (*Act. 1.*) it is said: *Ab hujus ergo (Sedis Apostolicæ) Fide, atque Doctrina separari minime cupientes, & Petrum, ac præcipue Sanctorum Sedis Apostolicæ Præfulum sequentes in omnibus confituta, anathematizamus omnes hæreses &c.* [Not desiring to be separated in any way from the Faith and Doctrine of this (Apostolic See), and following Peter and especially all the constitutions of the Prelates of the Holy Apostolic See, we anathematize all heresies, etc.] And with respect to the named Apostolic See it is said afterwards: *In qua est vera, & integra Christianæ Religionis soliditas.* [In which is the true and complete solidity of the Christian Religion]. In the First Nicene Council in *Can. 39.* it is said: *Ille qui tenet Sedem Romæ, Caput & Princeps est omnium Patriarcharum, quandoquidem ipse est primus, sicut Petrus, cui data est potestas in omnes Principes Christianos, & omnes Populos eorum, ut qui sit Vicarius Christi D. N. super cunctos Populos, & cunctam Ecclesiam Christianam: & quicumque contradixerit, a Synodo excommunicatur.* [He who holds the See of Rome is the Head and Prince of all Patriarchs, since he is the first, like Peter, to whom was given power

over all Christian Princes and all their Peoples, as he who is the Vicar of Christ Our Lord over all Peoples and the entire Christian Church: and whoever contradicts this is excommunicated by the Synod]. And in the Roman Council under Adrian II (*Act. 3.*) it is said: *Retro, olimque semper, cum hæreses, & scelera pullularent, noxias illas herbas, & zizania Apostolicæ Sedis (Romanæ) Successores extirparunt.* [In the past and always, when heresies and wickedness sprouted, the Successors of the Apostolic (Roman) See extirpated those noxious herbs and weeds]. In the Florentine Council at the last Session it is said: *Item definimus, sanctam Apostolicam Sedem, & Romanum Pontificem in universum Orbem tenere Primatum, esse Successorem B. Petri Principis Apostolorum, & vere Christi Vicarium, totiusque Ecclesiæ Caput; & ipsi in B. Petro pascendi, regendi, & gubernandi Universalem Ecclesiam a D. N. Jesu-Christo plenam potestatem traditam esse.* [Likewise we define that the holy Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold the primacy over the whole world, and that the Roman Pontiff himself is the successor of blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and the true Vicar of Christ, and the head of the whole Church, and that to him, in blessed Peter, was given by our Lord Jesus Christ full power to feed, rule, and govern the Universal Church]. Moreover, in the Council of Constance, Proposition 37 of Wycliffe was condemned, which stated: *Papa non est immediatus, & proximus Vicarius Christi.* [The Pope is not the immediate and proximate Vicar of Christ]. And furthermore, the Epistle of Martin V was approved, wherein it was ordered to interrogate those suspected of heresy with this question: *Utrum credant, quod Papa sit Successor Petri, habens Supremam Auctoritatem in Ecclesia Dei?* [Whether they believe that the Pope is the Successor of Peter, having Supreme Authority in the Church of God?] From this it is seen that the Roman Pontiff has always been recognized as the successor of St. Peter, and consequently as the Vicar of Christ and the supreme Head of the Church.

5. But who can ever think that the Bishops, the Princes, the Holy Fathers, the Doctors, and the other Faithful (except for the Heretics, who have always sought to remove themselves from obedience to the Pope) have been so bewitched since the earliest times that they have been willing to endure for the span of so many centuries to subordinate themselves to the Bishop of Rome, venerating him as Head of the Church, and obligating themselves to hold his definitions as oracles; if they had not been certain, through the doctrine of Jesus Christ, that the Roman Pontiffs are true successors of St. Peter in the Primacy, and in the supreme Authority of the Church? But yes, because all have always held the Bishop of Rome as Head of the Church. And therefore the Roman Pontiffs after the death of St. Peter have always continued to ordain Bishops in other Churches (as it is read of St. Linus that he ordained 15): and others who poorly governed their Flocks, they have deposed. Bellarmine narrates that eight Patriarchs were deposed by the Pontiffs, especially in the Church of Constantinople. It is also known throughout the entire Body of Canon Law that Bishops in their doubts had recourse to the Roman Pontiffs, and their responses were held as laws. It is moreover certain (as we shall see below, in *Chapter X, number 15*) that these Pontiffs from the beginning condemned various heresies for many centuries, during which no Council was held.

6. But someone may say, if St. Peter was Bishop of Antioch, then of Alexandria, and then of Rome, why must only the successors of the Roman See possess the Pontifical authority, and not the successors of the Churches of Antioch and Alexandria? It is answered that the Bishops of Antioch and Alexandria have succeeded St. Peter in the Episcopate, but not in the Pontificate; because St. Peter was indeed first the particular Bishop of Antioch and Alexandria, but he did not establish the Pontificate in any of the said Churches, but rather transferred it with himself and planted it in the Roman See, which by him was elevated to the Pontifical Dignity; whence it is that only the Bishops who have succeeded St. Peter in the Roman See are his successors in the Pontificate. And this was the reason why all Antiquity always gave the Primacy to the Bishop of Rome, and not to those of Antioch and Alexandria, which Churches have been regarded only as Patriarchal in honor of St. Peter, by whom they were once governed.

7. That St. Peter lived many years (they say 25) in Rome, and died there, whatever the Innovators may say, has always been the common opinion of all the Holy Fathers, and of all Historians. Only the Authors have disagreed about the time, that is, regarding the year in which St. Peter came to Rome; but this does not contradict the fact that he was there for many years until his death. This, besides the testimony of so many Writers who affirm it, is also gathered from the Epistle of the same Apostle, where he writes: *Salutat vos Ecclesia, quæ est in Babylone collecta*. 1 Petr. 5. 13. By Babylon, St. Peter certainly meant Rome, as attested by Papias, Disciple of the Apostle, in Eusebius (*Histor. l. 2. cap. 15.*). And with this accords the Apocalypse *Cap. 17.* where the City of Rome is called Babylon with respect to the many superstitions practiced there by the Gentiles; and St. John in the same book already predicted that this Babylon would one day fall, which is to be understood as referring to Gentilism and to the temporal Empire.

8. Nor does it matter that the Pontiffs resided for many years in the City of Avignon in France, since personal residence in the Church of Rome was not of the essence of Pontifical Jurisdiction, nor meanwhile, while the Popes were in Avignon, was anyone considered Roman Pontiff other than he who resided in Avignon. It is a question, then, among the Learned whether the universal primacy of the Church is annexed to the Roman Episcopate by human or Divine law. For the rest, however this may be, it is certain that after the death of St. Peter, who fixed his Pontificate in the Roman See, it has not been, nor will it ever be lawful, even for the entire Church, to attach the succession of St. Peter to any bishop other than the Bishop of Rome, by separating the Episcopal power of Rome from the Pontifical power; because this would interrupt the Succession of Roman Bishops, from which the Faithful, with the guidance of the Holy Fathers, have always recognized the Succession of the power of St. Peter.

9. It is of no consequence that in past centuries some Pontiff may have been illegitimately elected, or fraudulently intruded into the Pontificate; it suffices that he was afterward accepted by the whole Church as Pope, since by such acceptance he has already been rendered a legitimate and true Pontiff. But if for some time he was not truly and universally accepted by the Church, in such a case for that period the Pontifical See would have been vacant, as it is vacant upon the death of Pontiffs. Similarly, it is of no consequence that in

cases of Schism there has been doubt for a considerable time as to who was the true Pontiff; because then one would have been the true one, although not sufficiently recognized; and if none of the Antipopes were true, then the Pontificate would have likewise been vacant.

10. That some Pontiffs have fallen into heresy, some have sought to prove, but they have never proved it, nor will they ever prove it; and we shall clearly prove the contrary at the end of Chapter X. For the rest, if God were to permit a Pope to be notoriously heretical and contumacious, he would cease to be Pope, and the Pontificate would be vacant. But if he were secretly heretical, and did not propose any false Dogma to the Church, then he would bring no harm to the Church: but we must justly presume, as Cardinal Bellarmine says, that God will never permit any of the Roman Pontiffs, even as a private person, to become a heretic, neither notorious nor secret.