

**Homily – Mass with Six Graders  
Saint Rose of Lima Catholic Church – February 22, 2022**

Have you noticed that the priest gets to have a bigger chair than everyone else when he celebrates Mass? There is a special reason for that. The chair is a symbol of the ministry of priests as teachers of the Word of God.

The apostles were endowed with the authority of Christ and they have passed on that authority through what is called “apostolic succession.” So, in the case of Bishops, our special chair is a symbol of our office and ministry as the authentic teachers of the same faith shared by the apostles of Jesus. For that reason, the Bishop’s chair is a big deal. That is why it has a special name in Latin and Greek, which is “cathedra.” Does that ring any bells? “Cathedra,” cathedral. The chair, literally, is the fixed seat of the bishop, placed in the mother church of a diocese, which is therefore called “cathedral”, and is the symbol of the authority of the bishop.

Now, the Pope’s chair is a much bigger deal. When the Pope teaches something definitively concerning the faith or morals, using his authority as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful, and the leader of all the bishops, it is said that he speak “ex-cathedra.” In other words, in those cases he symbolically speaks from his teaching chair. And in those rare cases, when the Pope speaks “ex-cathedra,” we as Catholics believe that he is infallible. But since only God can be infallible – meaning that he cannot make mistakes – we believe that when the Pope speak “ex-cathedra” it is actually the Holy Spirit who is confirming the teaching of Christ, and the Pope is

only his instrument. That is why the Chair of Saint Peter has a special feast day, which we celebrate today. It is a very old tradition. It began in Rome since the fourth century. On this feast, we thank God for the mission entrusted to the apostle Saint Peter and his successors, the Pope at any given moment.

Saint Peter was chosen by Christ as the “rock” on which to build the Church. The true “rock” is Jesus himself, but the Pope represents the Lord as his Vicar, his representative. The Pope is therefore entrusted with the authority of Jesus himself.

Christians do not understand authority like the world does. In the first reading – from the first letter of Saint Peter himself – we heard his teaching regarding authority. He says that it should be understood as “overseeing not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. **Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock.**”

Everyone has some sort of authority, not only the Pope and the Bishops. Of course your parents and your teachers have authority over you, but you also have some authority as soon as anyone follows you to do anything. The older ones have some authority over the younger and even the youngest ones demand attention.

Today the Lord calls us to exercise our authority as he does and as Pope Francis models it so well. In the way we exercise authority, he says that we must promote a revolution of tenderness. We must contribute to expand a culture of encounter.

Blessed Mother of Guadalupe, intercede for us to follow your model of tender care for those placed under your protection.