

February 22

FOR THE CHAIR OF SAINT PETER AT ANTIOCH

On the submission we owe the Church

106.1 First Point

It was on this day that Saint Peter, after the dispersion of the apostles, established his see at Antioch and was recognized by the faithful as the Vicar of Christ. This was the occasion when those who had embraced the faith began in this city to adopt the name of Christians.⁵⁶⁷ The Church has instituted a special feast to commemorate and honor this event, giving us an opportunity to consider with special attention the submission we owe to the Church and to the one who is its head.

The Church is our mother; to her we must be united in every way; on her we must depend in everything concerning religion. We must be submissive to all her decisions and listen to them as oracles. It is the Church, in fact, that makes the truth known to us. We must accept it from her mouth without any hesitation and without examination. All we have to say in answer to what the Church proposes to us is, I believe, without hesitating, without any doubts whatsoever.

We should, moreover, welcome everything the Church proposes to us and do so with great docility. It is Jesus Christ himself who has given the Church his power and authority over us, and who tells us that anyone who does not listen to the Church should be looked upon by us as a pagan and a publican.⁵⁶⁸ This caused Saint Augustine to say that he would not believe the Gospel if he were not bound to do so by the authority of the Church.

In your work you are obliged to teach children the truths of our holy religion. You must also show yourself, by necessity, outstanding by your simple and humble submission to all the decisions of the Church. Are you in this disposition?

106.2 Second Point

The Pope, being the Vicar of Jesus Christ and the visible head of the Church as well as the successor of Saint Peter, has wide authority over the entire Church, and all the faithful who are its members should look upon him as their father and as the voice God uses to give his orders to them. He possesses the universal power of binding and loosing⁵⁶⁹ that Jesus Christ gave to Saint Peter, and to him Jesus Christ has committed the responsibility, first given to this holy apostle, of feeding his flock.⁵⁷⁰

Your role, then, is to work in order to increase and take care of this sheepfold; you should, therefore, honor our Holy Father the Pope as the holy shepherd of this flock and as the High Priest of the Church. You should respect his every word. It should be enough that something comes from him for you to be infinitely attentive. Is this how you have acted up to the present? Adore God's authority in this sovereign Shepherd of souls, and in the future look upon him as the great teacher of the Church.

106.3 Third Point

The Bishops have been established by God to be the defenders of the Church. They are also, says Saint Paul, the first ministers of Jesus Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.⁵⁷¹

You must, therefore, honor their persons, respect their words, and be submissive to them in everything that concerns the care of the souls that have been entrusted to you. Since bishops have been appointed by God to watch over the doctrine and morals of those who labor under their ministry, and are in charge of the entire spiritual guidance of their diocese, all those who are employed in this labor to procure the salvation of souls must only do so in dependence on them. By this means they will draw down upon themselves and on their work the blessings of God. Acknowledge that it is God who established this hierarchy, and submit yourself to it.

It is significant that De La Salle wrote this meditation during the time when the Pope's authority was being seriously challenged over the issue of Jansenism, especially in France. Six different popes issued no less than twelve decrees against the adherents of this doctrine over a period of sixty years. The final condemnation came in the Bull Unigenitus from Pope Clement XI in September 1713. Cardinal Noailles of Paris led several bishops in opposition to this condemnation, and appealed to a General Council over the head of the pope. De La Salle was greatly disturbed by this, as he indicated in a letter to Gabriel Drolin. The firm support of the pope, illustrated by this meditation, is one of the chief characteristics of De La Salle's teaching to the Brothers and through them to the students in the Christian Schools. Regarding the original title of the feast, the Chair of Saint Peter at Antioch, Saint Gregory the Great (on whom De La Salle wrote a meditation for March 12) says that Saint Peter was regarded as the head of the Church in Antioch for seven years prior to his going to Rome. The feast is now called simply the Chair of Peter. It was celebrated as early as the fourth century in Rome itself.

567 Acts 11:26

568 Mt 18:17

569 Mt 16:19

570 Jn 21:15-17

571 1 Cor 4:1