



What Makes Us Catholic?

Infallibility

Do Catholics really believe that the Pope can do no wrong? Really?

No. Catholics do not believe the Pope can do no wrong. Nor does the Catholic Church hold that we must believe whatever the Pope says on any subject. What, then, is Infallibility? To whom does it apply?

When Jesus Christ instituted His Church to transmit and explain the Divine Revelation, it was absolutely necessary for Him to protect His Church from any error when doing so. Jesus said to Peter, the first Pope, "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." The Church, then, cannot declare heresy or Satan would prevail.

To whom does Infallibility apply? Infallibility applies to the Pope and to the Magisterium. The Magisterium is the Church's "living teaching office", which consists of all bishops, in communion with the Pope.

Does infallibility apply to everything the Pope and the Bishops say? According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), the Pope and Magesteruim enjoy infallibility only when he/they proclaim "*by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals.*" These proclamations "*must be adhered to with the obedience of faith.*"

One way the Pope proclaims by a "definitive act" is referred to as speaking "ex cathedra". This has happened only twice in modern history, in 1854 when Pope Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception, and in 1950 when Pius XII declared Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven. Infallible proclamations have also been made for centuries during Ecumenical Councils, where the Pope unites with the body of Bishops to declare infallible doctrines "for belief as being divinely revealed, and as the teaching of Christ".

As individuals, the Pope and the Bishops, like us, are sinners. Some Popes have even disgraced the office with their sinful behavior. However, infallibility tells us that when the Pope and the Magisterium, guided by the Holy Spirit, make declarations pertaining to faith and morals, we can, we must, believe.

Want to read more about this topic?

Sources:

- Matthew 16: 18
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 891

Further reading:

- <http://stmarydsm.org/ministry/growing-our-faith/>
- <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/papal-infallibility>

Do you have questions on this topic, or other topics you would like to learn more about?
Please complete the back side of this sheet and leave it in the box on the "What Makes Us Catholic?" stand.

Please note your question on this topic, or other topics you would like to learn more about below and leave it in the box on the "What Makes Us Catholic?" stand.

NAME _____ Phone # and/or Email _____