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Seasoning the Seasons™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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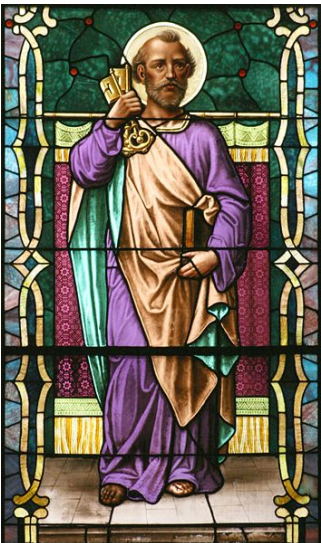
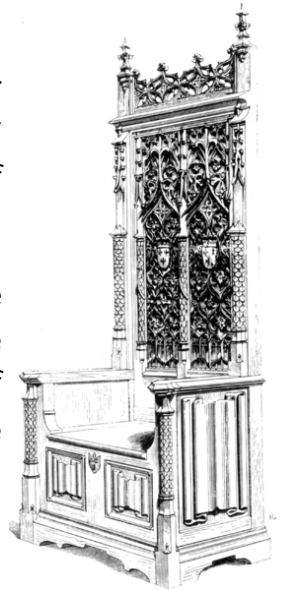
The Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle

Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle

February 22 is a special day on the Catholic Church's Calendar. It is the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle. Why do you think we would celebrate a Feast Day about a chair?

First of all, this feast is called the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle. Do you know who Saint Peter was? He was one of Jesus' apostles, and he was also the very first Pope. The Pope is the leader of all of the Catholics in the world.

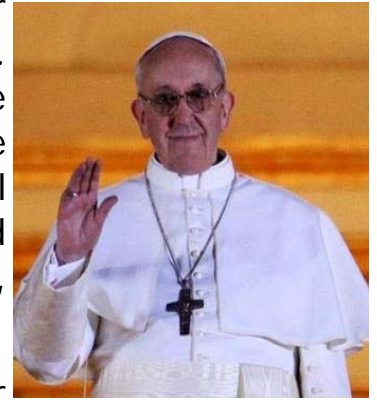
Now let's talk about that "chair." The ancient Latin word for the chair that important officials sat in is "cathedra." This is the word the Catholic Church uses for the Bishop's chair. The Pope is the Bishop of Rome. But every diocese has a bishop. And the church where the Bishop's chair is located at in each diocese is called the "cathedral" church of that diocese, because of the bishop's chair – the "cathedra." Have you ever been to the Cathedral in your diocese?



The Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle is a symbol of the authority that Jesus gave to Saint Peter to lead the Church. Saint Peter is often pictured holding keys, another symbol of his leadership and authority. In the Bible (Matthew 16:18-19), Jesus says he is giving the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter. Look at the picture of Saint Peter on this page. Do you see the keys?

Saint Peter was a martyr. That means that he was put to death for witnessing to his faith. When Saint Peter, who was the first Pope, died, the Church community chose a new Pope. And when that pope died, they chose yet another new Pope. Since the time of Saint Peter, we have had 266 Popes!

Can you name our current Pope? He is Pope Francis. If you followed the news in early 2013, you know that Pope Benedict XVI resigned, or stepped down from being Pope, the last day of February 2013. This was a very important historical event. Most popes continue in their ministry of being the pope until they die. This was the first time in almost 600 years that a pope left office while still alive. There was a brief period of time where our Church did not have a pope, until the new pope, Pope Francis, was elected, which happened March 13, 2013.



But let's get back to the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle. On the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle we not only celebrate Saint Peter, but we celebrate the office of the papacy – the office of leadership of our Catholic Church.

The Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle has been celebrated since the Fourth Century. In ancient Rome, between February 13 and February 22, people used to have a special celebration honoring their relatives who had died. At their celebration, they would leave a chair, or a "cathedra", empty in honor of their deceased relatives. Since it is not known on exactly what date Saint Peter died, the people began honoring him in a special way on February 22. They were celebrating his leadership of the Church of Rome – our Roman Catholic Church!



Bernini's "Gloria" surmounting the "Cathedra Petri", also by him. Saint Peter's Basilica, Vatican City. Photo taken 2005 by Ricardo André Frantz.

So, is there really a chair that Saint Peter, who lived in the time of Jesus, sat in that still exists today? Or is it all symbolic? Well, at Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, in Rome, there is an altarpiece, designed by the artist Bernini, that is said to contain a relic of the *Cathedra Petri*, or the Chair of Peter. But this is no longer the chair, or cathedra, which the pope uses as the Bishop of Rome. The cathedral church in Rome is actually Saint John Lateran, and it is here that the cathedra, or bishop's chair, is found.

While there is only one cathedra, or bishop's chair, in each diocese – at the cathedral church (remember that the cathedral is called the "cathedral" because it is where the "cathedra" is located), each parish church also

has a special chair. It is called the “presider’s chair.” Only the priest who is presiding, or leading, the liturgy sits in that chair. Do you see the presider’s chair in your parish church?



Choose one of the activities below to do to help celebrate the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle.

1. Write a prayer asking God to bless and guide Pope Francis, and all those who lead the Church.
2. Write a “want ad/job description” for a pope. What would you include as qualities and important background for being the pope? What do you think would be the main duties of the pope?
3. Find news articles about the Pope, and make a collage out of them.
4. Draw a picture of the Pope sitting on his “cathedra” – his special chair.
5. Draw a picture of Jesus with Saint Peter, the Apostle.