

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York 14202

Traditionally Speaking by S. Casarotto, CS 6/28/09

“Feed my sheep!”

Napoleon Bonaparte once manifested to his uncle Card. Joseph Fesch his desire to submit the Pope to his ambitious power. He said he would go as far as to destroy the papacy and the whole Church if anybody resisted. Card. Fesch told Napoleon: “My dear nephew, if we priests did not succeed in destroying the Church in all these years, neither will you!” Two thousand years ago, to the Jewish leaders who wanted to put a stop to the Christian movement, Gamaliel, a member of the Sinhedrin, said: “If this is a human endeavor, it will fall apart on its own. But if it is of God, not only we will not be able to destroy it, but we will also be accountable to God for opposing His will.” (Acts 5,34). In fact, the Church, notwithstanding all human weaknesses and limitations, survived all other political and social institutions and is very much alive today. Jesus assured St. Peter: “*To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the powers of the netherworld will not prevail!*” Dante Alighieri acknowledged that the Pope received from Christ “*lo poter de le somme chiavi*” (Divine Comedy), the power of the greatest keys.

If we think there are problems with the Church today, let us remember the Great Schism of the West when Christianity was pledging obedience to 3 popes at the same time! Kings, people, bishops and even saints were on different sides. The Church survived and eventually God sorted things out. At that time, St. Catherine of Siena, a Doctor of the Church, used to call the Pope “*Il dolce Cristo in terra*” (the Sweet Christ on earth). Later, St. Joan of Arc said: “*To me Christ and the Church are the same thing. Let us not complicate matters.*”

Many people say: “*Christ, yes! The Church, no!*” Certainly, the Church is also human. To pretend they were not, would be not only hypocritical, but also a denial that God came to save “*not the just but the unjust.*” Jesus Himself chose the Apostles who were far from perfect, starting with Peter who betrayed Him like Judas. All Christians, including the hierarchy and all those who point the fingers, are human. Church institutions, like all human organizations, are not perfect.

However, the Church - Body of Christ and Bride of Christ - is first of all divine. It cannot fail. It belongs to Christ and Christ is the Head of the Church.

From the early centuries, during the solemn liturgy of Good Friday, the Church prays for “*the Holy Church of God, that our Lord Jesus Christ and God may grant it peace, keep it in unity and guard it throughout the world...*” and for “*our most holy Father, the Pope,*” so that He may “*keep him in health and safety for His Holy Church to govern the holy people of God.*”

Today, Benedict XVI, like all the other popes in history, continues the mission of Jesus gave to Peter and His successors: “*Feed my lambs! Feed my sheep!*” Oremus pro pontifice!