

POPES 101

KAI: Hey, Libby, why can't the pope fall over?

LIBBY: Why?

KAI: Because when you sit on the chair of St. Peter, you're in-fall-ible, get it?

LIBBY: That's a terrible joke.

KAI: Yeah it is but maybe the pope can declare it funny.

LIBBY: He can't do that.

KAI: No, he can't, but some people think he can.

LIBBY: Well good thing on Catholic Central today we're talking about the office of the pope and what he can and can't do.

KAI: The papacy is like a marriage, marriage to the Church.

LIBBY: You're not going to talk like the clergyman from "The Princess Bride" the whole ...

KAI: Love, true love.

CATHOLIC CENTRAL OPENING TITLES

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: I'm Kai, welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: What is the pope? There are many important sounding names for him, his holiness.

KAI: Vicar of Christ.

LIBBY: Bishop of Rome.

KAI: Supreme Pontiff.

LIBBY: Servant of the Servants of God.

KAI: Primate of the Church.

LIBBY: And many others.

KAI: The word pope or papa comes from the affection Latin and Greek for father. You can think of him like your dad.

LIBBY: Sure, your dad might have an important job, but at home you know him as the guy who's worn the same sweatpants for 15 years. How did we get a pope?

KAI: The pope is the successor to the Apostle Peter.

LIBBY: Jesus chose Simon, one of the 12 Apostles and renamed him Peter, which means rock. Jesus said, "On this rock, I will build my Church." Peter is the rock.

KAI: Jesus made a pun.

LIBBY: Jesus went on to give us three metaphors about the church. One, Peter will be the rock-solid foundation on which the Church will be built. Two, Peter has the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, with authority to open or close as he sees fit.

KAI: Three, he has authority to guide and steward the Church. He's the one who settles conflicts and tries to draw people together in the Church.

LIBBY: He can't just do whatever he wants.

KAI: Right, there are limitations. After all, it's Christ's Church, not Peter's.

LIBBY: After his resurrection, Jesus entrusts Peter with the mandate of shepherding the Church. He tells him, "Feed my sheep."

KAI: He actually says this to Peter three times.

LIBBY: Jesus doesn't want to leave his people without a leader to love and care for them. Peter and his successors represent Jesus.

KAI: In fact, another name for the Pope is Vicar of Christ. Vicar is the root of vicarious, which means "to represent."

LIBBY: They did stand in his place even in his sacrificial love. They worked to keep the worldwide faith unified and focused on Christ's mission to love and serve.

KAI: It hasn't always been easy. Many of the popes in the first 250 years of Christianity died as martyrs.

LIBBY: Including Peter, who was crucified upside down in Rome between 64 and 67 AD. He was buried where the Vatican now stands. St. Linus followed Peter as pope, and another after him and another after him right up to today.

KAI: We can trace our popes back to the Apostles. This is called Apostolic Succession. Now, I have some friends who are excited cause the pope is shaking things up and getting in there, stirring up the system.

LIBBY: They need to remember the pope doesn't have authority to just redo everything in his own taste.

KAI: Right, he is Vicar, he represents Christ therefore his only agenda is to point people to Christ himself.

LIBBY: Misconceptions about the popes have always been a problem. Then people have had misconceptions about Jesus, too.

KAI: We live in a world where sound bites and sensationalism get all the attention.

LIBBY: What the pope says and how it's spun by the media are often not the same. You can always read what the pope actually said on the Vatican Website.

KAI: Also, not everything the pope says has equal weight. Papal encyclicals are more formal writings addressed to the faithful on Church teachings whereas something mentioned in a general audience or a homily are more informal.

LIBBY: What about the pope's title as worldwide leader of the Catholic Church as Bishop of Rome?

KAI: The area within Italy known as the Vatican currently has a population of about 840 people.

LIBBY: The smallest country on earth, at only 109 acres.

KAI: Or roughly 1/275th the size of DisneyWorld. It doesn't have rides but it does have really cool-looking security guards.

LIBBY: The Vatican is a city-state, which means it's a sovereign entity in an international community. The pope has power to govern, as long as it lines up with his first job, Vicar of Christ.

KAI: Every pope has made excellent decisions and ruled with fairness and equality, am I right?

LIBBY: Well popes are human and vulnerable to pride, greed, anger and all the other forces of evil you and I are.

KAI: See our "7 Deadly Sins" episode.

LIBBY: In the past, some popes took advantage of their office and made some selfish and harsh decisions, usually for personal gain.

KAI: Then they pitched their stories to premium cable channels and landed multi-episode deals.

- LIBBY: Popes are human. The vast majority of popes treated their office with dignity and humility. There have been far more holy popes than malicious ones.
- KAI: Right but bad popes make good television. Still, even the bad popes couldn't take down what was already formed by the Church. Reformers in the Church helped to get it back on track.
- LIBBY: There have been great leaders who've read the signs of the times and helped guide the church amid changes in the world, popes such as Gregory the Great, Leo VII, Pius X, John XXIII and John Paul II.
- KAI: Actually speaking of good television, the way the pope gets picked makes pretty good television. It's cinematic. It's full of mystery and intrigue. When a pope dies ...
- LIBBY: Or resigns ...
- KAI: The governance of the Church passes to the college of cardinals. Cardinals are high officials ranking next to the pope, and appointed by him to assist in the governance of the Church. They wear red vestments in formal settings.
- LIBBY: The cardinals hold a series of meetings at the Vatican called general congregations. They discuss the needs and challenges facing the Church. They will also prepare for the papal election called the conclave.
- KAI: To the conclave, cardinal men.
- LIBBY: The cardinals gather in St. Peter's Basilica for a Mass to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit in electing a new pope in the conclave.
- KAI: To the conclave, cardinal men.

- LIBBY: Conclave means literally “with key.” For the conclave, the cardinal electors go to the Sistine Chapel and take an oath of absolute secrecy before sealing the doors.
- KAI: The cardinals vote by secret ballot going one by one up to Michelangelo's fresco of “The Last Judgment,” saying a prayer and dropping the ballot, twice folded, in a large chalice.
- LIBBY: Four rounds of balloting are taken every day.
- KAI: If no one receives two-thirds at the vote, the ballots are burned in a stove near the chapel with a mixture of chemicals to produce black smoke.
- LIBBY: When a cardinal receives two-thirds of the vote and accepts, the ballots of the final round are burned to produce white smoke, to signal to the whole world the election of a new pope.
- KAI: The new pope chooses a papal name and is dressed in papal vestments before going out to the balcony in St. Peter's Basilica. The senior cardinal deacon announces “Habemus papam!,” which means, “We have a pope.”
- LIBBY: The new pope then comes out to impart his blessing on the city of Rome and the entire world.
- KAI: Once the pope is elected, he is the steward of the Magisterium, the Church's teaching office, consisting of the pope and his brother bishops.
- LIBBY: The pope is the teacher of the teachers of the Church. He leads a discussion with the bishops reflecting on the whole world and the needs of all. Their task as the Magisterium is to faithfully interpret the word of God in light of scripture and centuries of tradition.
- KAI: The pope has the ability to declare certain teachings on faith and morals to be infallible. Infallibility means they're free from fallacy or error.

LIBBY: You may have heard some people say the pope can declare infallibly whatever he wants but that's not true.

KAI: The pope can analyze an article of divine revelation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, when he formally speaks from the chair, or *ex cathedra* in Latin. That teaching is declared infallible and free of error.

LIBBY: While there are many tenets of the faith derived from scripture and tradition that are considered to be infallibly true ...

KAI: Like the Trinity or the Resurrection of Jesus.

LIBBY: There are only two teachings, which popes have declared *ex cathedra* infallible.

KAI: The pope can't go around willy-nilly and declare whatever he wants -- like puns are the highest form of humor.

LIBBY: Popes are reluctant to exercise infallibility without study, discussion and prayer among the wisest people in the Church. He shepherds the discovery of truth.

KAI: The pope is powerful but not in the way that many people think. For Catholics, the pope matters because he's a conduit for the power of Christ.

LIBBY: If Jesus was the wind, the pope is the windmill. If Jesus is the sun, the pope is the solar panel.

KAI: If you want to know more about the pope, you can check out the links on our Website, and you can also follow the pope on Twitter.

LIBBY: That's all for today. Thanks for watching Catholic Central. I'm Libby.

KAI: I'm Kai. Don't forget, "Who's your papa?"

LIBBY: It's the pope.

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