# **The Pope and Remaining in the Bark**Nov. 5

Fr. Jordi Rivero

There is much confusion regarding the types of assent to the declarations of a pope that the Catholic faith requires of the faithful. The Catechism teaches that there are different types of papal statements:

1– “Infallible definitions.” To these, we give the assent of faith.

2– The “ordinary Magisterium.” These are teaching that “without arriving at an infallible definition and without pronouncing in a “definitive manner” they propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to a better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals.” “The faithful are to adhere to it with religious assent which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it. (CCC 892)

3–The third kind of statement is those that are not part of the Magisterium. These are not presented as formal teachings in matters of faith and morals. They are the Pope’s views on pastoral or social issues, which should be considered respectfully but do not call for the assent of faith or religious assent. In other words, they need to be discerned, and the faithful may disagree.

But what about if the Pope appears to support pastoral initiatives that contradict Church teaching, for example, homosexual activity? Maybe the pope’s message is not clear. In any case, we should remain faithful to Church Teaching. We should not react by closing our hearts to everything that such a pope teaches. The supreme authority of the Pope in matters of faith and morals remains true with popes that make confusing statements when speaking the third type of statements.

Jesus gave Peter the keys, then severely rebuked him for holding on to a human way of thinking but did not revoke his call. Then, although Peter denied him, the resurrected Jesus confirmed him again in his call.

A **papal maximalist** believes that everything the pope says is protected from error. This is false. The pope can be wrong on matters (such as the vaccine) that are not authoritative teachings of the magisterium. The faithful may reach a different opinion. **A papal minimalist** holds that, unless the pope speaks ex cathedra, there is no assent required. This is also false. Teachings of the ordinary magisterium that have not been pronounced infallibly require the assent of the faithful. If we only accept the popes we like, we have become judges over the Church and are not trusting the Holy Spirit.

**The temptation of schism**

St. Ignatius teaches that the devil is a brilliant strategist. He studies our defenses to discover our weak points and what doors are easiest to pry open to enter our hearts. If we are firmly pro-life, he will not attack us there. He knows where we hurt and what is disturbing us, and that is where his lies are most effective. He will tempt us to react to the trials we face without trusting God.

Today we suffer the trial of wolves ravaging the flock while shepherds fail to defend it and, in many cases, enable the wolves. As a result, many Catholics who not long ago would say, “to be faithful to Christ, one must be with the Pope,” now reject the authority of the Pope. What happened? They were ready to battle against the world but not to be wounded by the shepherds. Satan then sets the trap by offering false solutions, such as blaming the Second Vatican Council[[1]](#footnote-1) and doubting the authority of the pope. Some call pope Francis by his last name, “Bergolio,” to avoid calling him pope.

Schisms often begin as reactions to something in the Church that needs correction. If we do not suffer it united with Christ, our hearts get infected with contempt, resentment, and condemnation. Luther protested against the abuses and corruption among the Church’s shepherds, but pride blinded him and led him to make himself the judge of how reform should take place. The result was the great schism that remains to this day.

If our shepherds cause us wounds, we are tempted to find satisfaction when they are vilified. We then spread the poison. **St. Teresa of Avila advises to “never affirm anything unless you are sure it is true.”[[2]](#footnote-2)** But even if we were certain, does the Lord want me to judge in this matter, to dwell on it, to propagate it?

The saints see what is wrong in the Church and suffer for it. St Paul confronted Peter but continued to recognize him as head of the Church. He remained focused on the mission that God had given him so that God could bring about true renewal through him.

When Mother Theresa was asked: “What would you do to improve the Church?” Her answer was: “**I would change myself**.” This is what Jesus taught: First, we must remove the beam from our eye and come to self-knowledge and knowledge of Him. Then God will work through us as He pleases. The saints prove that no crisis in the Church can stop us from becoming saints if we have faith. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross wrote, “We can turn evil into an opportunity for purification.”

The Lord has called us in our community to **be victim souls for our shepherds**. We believe in the power of suffering for them united with Christ.

* We love the Pope.
* We assent to what pertains to the Magisterium.
* We do not judge as if we were a superior authority. We try to understand, and if we cannot reconcile the Pope’s words with Catholic doctrine, we allow our hearts to be pierced; we remain faithful to the truth.

**St. Cyprian**, Father of the Church, wrote:

If a man does not hold fast to this oneness of Peter, does he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he deserts the Chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, has he still confidence that he is in the Church?[[3]](#footnote-3)

Cardinal Sarah: “The truth is that the Church is represented on earth by the Vicar of Christ, the Pope. And whoever is against the Pope is, *ipso facto*, outside the Church.[[4]](#footnote-4)”

This does not mean that the pope and other shepherds are beyond reproach.

**St. Catherine of Siena**

She prayed to hear about the sins of the ministers in order to “increase my grief, compassion, and anxious desire for their salvation; for I remember that Thou didst say, that, on account of the endurance and tears, the grief, and sweat and prayers of Thy servants, Thou wouldst reform the holy church, and comfort her with good and holy pastors. I ask Thee that these sentiments may increase in me.” –Dialogue.

God the Father told herregarding the shepherds of the Church:

**You must not reverence them for themselves, but for the authority I have entrusted to them.** Therefore, you must not sin against them because if you do, you are really sinning not against them but against me. This I have forbidden, and I have said that it is my will that no one should touch them.

For this reason, no one has an excuse to say, “I am doing no harm, nor am I rebelling against the Holy Church. I am simply acting against the sins of evil pastors.” Such persons are deluded, blinded as they are by their own selfishness… It is me they assault, just as it was me they reverenced. To me redounds every assault they make on my ministers: derision, slander, disgrace, abuse. Whatever is done to them, I count as done to me….

The virtuous must not lessen their reverence, even should these ministers fall short in virtue. And so far as the virtues of my ministers are concerned... [they are] stewards of…my Son’s body and blood and of the other sacraments. This dignity belongs to all who are appointed as such stewards, to the bad as well as to the good.

**You should hold [these sinful ministers] out to me with tears and great desire**, so that I in my goodness may clothe them with the garment of charity… Indeed, I have appointed them and given them to you to be angels on earth…as I have told you. When they are less than that, you ought to pray for them. But you are not to judge them. Leave the judging to me, and I, because of your prayers and my own desire, will be merciful to them.

**The more you offer me sorrowful and loving desires for them, the more you will prove your love for me**. For the service neither you nor my other servants can do for me, you ought to do for them instead. Then I will let myself be constrained by the longing and tears and prayers of my servants and will be merciful to my bride by reforming her with good and holy shepherds.

**Mark Mallet, in his article entitled “This is a Test,” argues that our Catholicity is being tested:**

* **If you have lost your peace** over anything happening in Church today, you are failing the test. Our peace comes from trust in Jesus, who is the Lord of history and is with us in all trials… Phil 4,6: “Have no anxiety at all.”
* **If you think that the Second Vatican Council, the Novus Ordo Mass, or any of the magisterial teachings since St. Pope John XXIII** are the cause of the upheaval, you are failing the test. Our Catholic faith teaches us that the Holy Spirit guides all the Councils of the Church. There may be many controversies in them, but the result is Christ’s teaching to His Bride. In addition, Pope John XXIII, Pope Paul VI, and Pope John Paul II –the great defenders of the Council, are canonized saints, a further sign of God’s approval upon their Magisterium.
* **If you say that the hierarchy is destroying the Church**, you are forgetting the promise of Jesus: Mt 16:18: “I will build my Church and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.” Shepherds have an important mission, and they can do much harm if they are unfaithful, but the Lord will always prevail.
* **If you are judging the Pope, you are failing the test.** The Pope can make mistakes, we may disagree on things that are not defined by the Magisterium, but we owe him the respect of his office as the vicar of Christ. It would be our loss if we ignored the immense richness of his teachings because there are some that we struggle with.
* **If you have said that Pope Francis is a false pope** and the real one is Benedict XVI, you are failing the test. The pope emeritus wrote:  “it’s actually a straightforward matter… no one has tried to blackmail me. If that had been attempted, I would not have gone since you are not permitted to leave because you’re under pressure. It’s also not the case that I would have bartered or whatever. On the contrary, the moment had—thanks be to God—a sense of having overcome the difficulties and a mood of peace. A mood in which one really could confidently pass the reins over to the next person.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

**God has given us a mission**, a way of life. It may appear insignificant, like a mustard seed, but if we believe, we will move mountains. The Lord asks us to be victims of love for our shepherds. He told us about our shepherds:

Army of Holy Priests Prepares the Way for New Pentecost. 3/17/2010
After reading Jeremiah 10

*You will prophesy the new Pentecost that is on the horizon. You will prepare the way by raising up My army of holy priests. You will call them to repentance. Tell them of My immense love for each of them. I am their Father waiting for them to come back to Me. I wish to embrace them and forgive them. I want them to know and experience the love I have for each of them. I want them to understand how much I need them to fulfill My work of redemption. My hands are nailed to the Cross; I need each of them to be My hands, to anoint, bless and heal My children. I need them to be My feet, moving out as My missionaries to proclaim My words. I need them to be My eyes so that My divine gaze can penetrate the core of My children and bring them to repentance and reconciliation with God, their Father. I need them to be My suffering and pierced Heart to My people, My Heart of compassion. My daughter, My priests MUST become My loving image in the world. They, united to My Mother, will bring the Church to the foot of My Cross, and through their cries, supplication, prayers, and tears, the Holy Spirit will be released from My Cross.*

See Catechism on the pope #882, #937, #2034.

1. <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/07/01/analysis-as-archbishop-vigano-denounces-vatican-ii-the-vatican-is-not-speaking>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Complete Works, Vol 3, 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, "On the Unity of the Catholic Church", n. 4; The Faith of the Early Fathers, Vol. 1, pp. 220-221 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Corriere della Sera, October 7th, 2019; [americamagazine.org](https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/10/09/cardinal-sarah-oppose-pope-be-outside-church) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Benedict XVI, Last Testament in His Own Words, with Peter Seewald; p. 24 (Bloomsbury Publishing) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)