

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

CATHOLIC APOLOGETICS 101

## The Pope

Someone recently forwarded me an e-mail she had received from a friend who questioned aspects of Roman Catholicism. The misconceptions that I have been covering in these “Celestial Musings” for the past four months were mentioned in the e-mail. Here is an actual excerpt from the author who stated, “I have studied Catholicism extensively.”

God wants nothing to do with this “religion” and it really wants nothing to do with Him either. How many of you have studied Roman Catholicism at all? Forget study, how many know that it is an outright abomination to bow before any man (it's called worship, folks)? Or “pray to the dead”? Or worship and pray to Mary? Or that the pope's hat declares him to be the “Vicar Son of God” (ACTUAL representation of Christ Himself on the earth)?

This gentleman, without maliciously intending to, is perpetuating the very misconceptions that I have been trying hard to clarify. According to what he wrote, his e-mail was inspired by the death of the pope. His concern about the pope being the “Vicar Son of God,” offers me an opportunity to explain the role and ministry of the pope.

First of all, one of the pope's titles, “Vicar of Christ,” has less to do with who the pope is and everything to do with who Christ is. The word vicar literally means “to act for another.” Every single Christian is called *by Christ* to be His vicar and ambassador—“He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me’” (Mark 8:34). Saint Paul confirmed this need for all Christians to act for Christ by writing things like, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20) and, “Be imitators of me” (1 Corinthians 4:16), and more specifically, “I, Paul, [am] an ambassador and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1:9). Paul was not trying to be arrogant, but rather, he recognized that it was his Christian responsibility to show Christ to the world; to act in, with, and for Christ. The pope, like all Christians, is called to be the Vicar of Christ. The pope, by virtue of his ministry as first among the disciples of Christ, should be first among His vicars. Saint Gregory the Great, pope from 590-604 A.D., offers us further explanation of the primacy of the pope's ministry and service.

It was Pope Gregory who first used the title, “Servant of the Servants of God.” This title offers us insight into what it means to be the Vicar of Christ. If a vicar is one who acts for another, and Jesus offered us an example of service, then the pope's primary role is to serve Christ in His Church. The pope is not asked to do anything more than what every follower of Christ is asked to do—to kneel down at the feet of others and humbly and lovingly wash their feet.<sup>1</sup>

As Catholics, we do not worship other human beings, or pray to the dead, or worship and pray to Mary. As for calling the pope the “Vicar of Christ,” we do it proudly, and with the hope that the pope is only *one* of *millions* of Christians who follow Christ!

---

<sup>1</sup> John 13:5 “Then [Jesus] poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.”