

Where Does Church Authority Come From?

People often find it difficult to accept the authority of God coming through a sin-spoiled man. This is nothing new. They questioned Moses about this long ago. “Can't God speak through any of us as well as you, Moses?” God has always given His godly authority to His chosen men, and some people have always resented this. The Lord has chosen men to speak His word, men to exercise His power, and men to rule for Him among His people. These are His prophets, His priests, and His kings. All this now rests in Jesus, risen and alive in His Church.

Since human lives are short, our Lord has provided that those chosen to exercise His authority have successors to continue to rule and speak and act in His Holy name until He comes again in glory. When Moses was 120 years old and about to die, his God-given authority was passed on to Joshua.

Since all men are to some degree sinners, God has provided that those He has called hold their authority by the goodness of Jesus, and not by their own merit. This is why priests who are serious sinners can still validly forgive sins. This is also why even a few bad popes in history were still the valid leaders of our Holy Church. God chooses to work through men, and sinners are all He has to work with. In all history, only Jesus and Mary were sinless.

King Saul was a bad king who was trying to kill David, yet when David had a chance to kill Saul, David refused saying, “Who am I to strike the anointed of the Lord.” David himself later became king and centuries later Jesus succeeded to final kingship in the line of David.

All through the Old and New Testament we see a pattern of God's authority in the hands of men. Elisha succeeded Elijah who left him his mantel before he was taken alive to heaven. Both Jesus and St. Paul, when they were on trial, still respected the imperfect high priest

King Jesus, our lawgiver and high priest gave the keys of His Kingdom to St. Peter, the enduring Rock upon which He would build His Church. He said, “what you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.” In Acts of the Apostles we see that St. Peter, Paul and the apostles would appoint successors and lay their hands on them to pass on their authority. No man could take this upon himself. Writings of the early Church Fathers confirm this practice. This is the kind of godly authority alive in the Bishops and Pope who are ordained in the direct line of the apostles. This is why the magisterium of the Catholic Church speaks and acts and blesses with the incarnate authority of Jesus Himself.