

Faithful Disciple

St. Raymond of Peñafort

St. Raymond of Peñafort was born near Barcelona, Spain, in 1175. At a young age, Raymond began studying *canon law* (the collection of laws and policies regarding the Church's leadership and ecclesial function) and became a professor of canon law during his twenties. Raymond went to Bologna in 1210 to continue studying canon law; he became a prominent professor at the University of Bologna.

Raymond was attracted by the ministry of the Dominican Order, which was new at the time, and he was eventually ordained as a Dominican priest. One of his contemporaries in the Dominican Order was St. Thomas Aquinas. Fr. Raymond founded institutes to promote the study of various languages of the Middle East, with the goal of spreading the Gospel throughout the region. In 1229, Pope Gregory IX took note of Fr. Raymond's expertise in canon law and appointed him to reorganize all of the documents related to canon law within the Church's archive. Fr. Raymond's task was not to redefine doctrine but to restructure how canon law was presented. At the time, there were multiple volumes of canon law in existence, leading to some confusion and time-consuming searches through the sometimes repetitious content. Raymond's responsibilities thus included condensing and clarifying the various tenets of the canon law library.

Upon Raymond's completion of the reorganization of the code of canon law, Pope Gregory IX was so impressed with his labors that he asked him to be the archbishop of Tarragona, Spain. However, Raymond humbly declined this nomination. In 1238, Raymond was elected as the general of the Dominican Order, although he only remained in this role for two years.

St. Raymond of Peñafort lived to be nearly one hundred years old, and his life exemplifies the rich spiritual environment and personal call to holiness in service to the Church that typified the Middle Ages. St. Raymond of Peñafort is one of the patron saints of lawyers, particularly canon lawyers.



Reading Comprehension

1. What is *canon law*?
2. Why was St. Raymond of Peñafort selected to be a professor of canon law?
3. How did Pope Gregory IX want to reward St. Raymond for organizing the canon law library? What was St. Raymond's response?



Writing Task

Write a two-paragraph definition of canon law based on information provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. See www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law.

Explaining the Faith

Why do Catholics rely on the pope?

Without the pope, the unity of the Church would be threatened by local churches and bishops addressing competing national and cultural concerns. The pope is the “perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity of bishops and the multitude of the faithful” (*Lumen Gentium*, 23).

There have been many times in the history of the Church when such national concerns did seem to compromise the unity and universal nature of the Church. In some of these instances, the personal, national ties of the reigning pope contributed to the problem, yet the formal institution of the papacy has always stood for a unity that supersedes those ties. Even after the most troublesome periods of Church history, the papacy, because it was established by Christ, has always been maintained as an institution that is not subject to any one nation or culture. As the successor of St. Peter and head of the college of bishops, the pope is the pastor who watches over the whole Church and each of her members throughout the world.

Each diocese or “local church” is led by its own bishop, who has also been established by the Holy Spirit. The bishop has the primary responsibility for interpreting and handing on the apostolic tradition within his own diocese and also for keeping his diocese united to the universal Church. Each bishop must adapt the Church’s teachings to the particular culture and particular needs of his own diocese. Yet when these necessary and lawful adaptations are made, it is important that the unity of the Church be maintained. The fidelity of each individual bishop, and of all the bishops together, to the bishop of Rome—the pope—helps ensure that unity is not lost.

The role of the pope is not limited to the preservation of the Church’s unity. The pope also has the task of giving voice to the universal mission and vocation of the Church. The pope calls Catholics everywhere to remember their responsibility to all people in the world, not just those in their immediate vicinity. The pope also calls Catholics everywhere to remember that there are certain teachings that cannot be adapted to suit the local culture. Some issues—such as the protection of the rights of the most defenseless—are fundamental to the universal vocation of the Church; they must not be ignored or denied by those who wish to call themselves Catholic.



Further Research

Read paragraphs 22 and 23 and appendix 4 of *Lumen Gentium* (see www.vatican.va). Write two paragraphs summarizing what the document says about the pope’s role in effecting the Church’s unity and about his power as supreme pontiff.

Chapter 4 Teacher Resources

Faithful Disciple: St. Raymond of Peñafort

Reading Comprehension

1. What is *canon law*? Canon law is the collection of laws and policies regarding the Church's leadership and ecclesial function.
2. Why was St. Raymond of Peñafort selected to be a professor of canon law? He had begun studying canon law at a young age, and went to Bologna to continue his studies in 1210. He developed an impressive expertise in canon law.
3. How did Pope Gregory IX want to reward St. Raymond for organizing the canon law library? What was St. Raymond's response? Pope Gregory IX wanted to name St. Raymond Archbishop of Tarragona, Spain, but Raymond humbly declined the nomination.

Writing Task

Write a two-paragraph definition of canon law based on information provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. See www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law. Students can follow additional links found on this webpage to locate sufficient information to fill two paragraphs. They might also seek additional sources to flesh out their understanding. Students might locate one of several websites published by individual canon lawyers to explain their discipline, or might contact a canon lawyer in your home diocese for further explanation. See *Additional Background Information* for additional resources that may be of interest.

Additional Background Information

The biography “St. Raymond of Peñafort,” available at www.newadvent.org/cathen/12671c.htm, goes into additional detail about St. Raymond's work to collect and organize existing canon law at the request of Pope Gregory IX.

Our Sunday Visitor offers an overview of the position of canon lawyer today. See Francis Hoffman's “What Is a Canon Lawyer?” *OSV Newsweekly*, www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/ByIssue/Article/TabId/735/ArtMID/13636/ArticleID/14201/What-is-a-Canon-Lawyer.aspx.

Canon lawyers may be ordained or lay. The Catholic University of America's School of Canon Law offers the preeminent program in the United States for those seeking a licentiate in canon law (JCL) degree or a doctorate in canon law. Information about this school's programs and their prerequisites may be found at The Catholic University of America's School of Canon Law: canonlaw.catholic.edu/academics/degree-programs/index.html.

Cathy Caridi, JCL, an American canon lawyer who practices and also teaches in Rome, hosts a website—Canon Law Made Easy: Church Law for Normal People (canonlawmadeeasy.com)—that aims to provide answers to canonical questions asked by ordinary Catholics. It offers insight into what sorts of questions are answered by canon law. Caridi emphasizes in many posts that “canon law follows theology.”

Explaining the Faith

Why do Catholics rely on the pope?

Further Research

Read paragraphs 22 and 23 and appendix 4 of *Lumen Gentium* (see www.vatican.va). Write two paragraphs summarizing what the document says about the pope's role in effecting the Church's unity and about his power as supreme pontiff. *Student responses will vary but should emphasize the connection of the current pope to St. Peter and of the current bishops to the Apostles. Students may also discuss concepts such as the following:*

- *Though they are joined together, the bishops themselves do not have authority unless understood together with the pope, as he is the successor of Peter and it was to Peter individually that Christ entrusted the keys of the Church.*
- *The pope is the visible foundation of the unity of the Church as the bishops lead and teach within their particular churches—their home dioceses.*
- *The bishops exercise their pastoral government over the particular church assigned to their care, and not over other dioceses, and not over the universal Church. That said, by governing well they contribute to the welfare of the Mystical Body of Christ—to the Church as a whole.*
- *While the college of bishops cannot act without the pope, the pope can always exercise his power as needed, though it is understood that there is communion between the head of the college of bishops (the pope) and its members (the bishops).*

Additional Background and Resources

In an EWTN interview, Dr. Scott Hahn of Franciscan University of Steubenville—himself a convert to Catholicism—discusses the topic of papal primacy in EWTN's "Reasons to Believe: Papal Primacy," January 17, 2014, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqfv8I8P9-0.

Dr. Hahn also offers a three-part lecture titled "Why Do We Have a Pope?" that begins at www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2xYspl4PS8&t=140s.

In both of these talks, Hahn describes reasons why non-Catholics question our reliance on the pope, misunderstandings about papal infallibility, and how the understanding of papal primacy can be established and defended.

While papal primacy and papal infallibility are not synonymous, the doctrines are related to one another. Papal infallibility is a commonly misunderstood teaching, and this misunderstanding leads many to doubt Catholics' faith in the pope's authority. Although the doctrine was not precisely defined until 1870, during the First Vatican Council, it had been understood as doctrine for centuries and was certainly accepted during the Middle Ages. From EWTN.com:

[The First Vatican Council's declaration] was by way of stating clearly what Christ's teaching was, not by way of adding anything new. Vatican I therefore carefully enumerated the conditions

under which the Pope was in fact infallible—the same conditions which logic demands, which Scripture suggests, and which tradition shows us in action down through the centuries. When the Pope (1) intends to teach (2) by virtue of his supreme authority (3) on a matter of faith and morals (4) to the whole Church, he is preserved by the Holy Spirit from error. His teaching act is therefore called “infallible” and the teaching which he articulates is termed “irreformable.”

The doctrine does not mean that the pope is without sin, that he is perfect, or that he always says or does the right thing!