

Authority in the Church—Teaching and Governing

Lesson Focus | So that his work on earth could continue, Christ commissioned his apostles (and in turn their successors) to teach and govern his Church. To assist them in that work, the Holy Spirit gives the Pope, and the bishops in union with the Pope, the gift of infallibility. This means that, when certain conditions are met, the teachings of the Pope and ecumenical councils on faith and morals are free from error. The Pope and the bishops in union with him also have the authority to establish Church disciplines—rules that, unlike doctrine, can change with time.

1 | begin

- Pray the Glory Be with your child.
- Explain to your child the two types of rules in your home. First, rules that are universal and unchanging in all homes—no lying, hitting, etc. Second, rules particular to your home that help life run smoothly and can change—bedtimes, television privileges, etc.
- Read Matthew 18:15–18 aloud.

2 | summarize

Summarize this week’s lesson for your child:

Example: *Jesus gave his apostles authority to teach, define, and defend the unchanging universal teachings of his Church (called doctrines), as well as to establish rules that can change depending on the time, place, and needs of the Church (called disciplines).*

3 | review

Review this week’s lesson by asking your child the following questions:

1. Define infallibility. (*Protection from teaching error in matters of faith and morals.*)
2. Who has the gift of infallibility? (*The Pope and the bishops teaching in union with him.*)
3. Is everything the Pope says infallible? (*No, he must be speaking to the whole Church and intending to use his authority to pronounce an unchangeable decision.*)
4. Is the Pope free from sin? (*No, infallibility only protects the Pope from error in certain teachings.*)
5. Can a Pope ever change a Church doctrine? What is an example of a doctrine? (*No; the Incarnation, Mary’s perpetual virginity, the Trinity, the nature of marriage, the sanctity of life, etc.*)
6. Can a Pope change a discipline? What is an example of a discipline? (*Yes; the length of the fast before Mass, the times of Mass, rules about fasting and abstinence, etc.*)

References

- Student Textbook: Chapter 5, pp. 32–38
- Sacred Scripture: Mt 18:15–18; Jn 8:32; 14:26
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 42, 85–95, 832, 871–96, 1730–48, 2041–43

4 | apply

Help your child apply this week's lesson by asking the following questions:

1. How does knowing the truth about the moral law make you free? How are you more free than someone who doesn't know or obey any moral law?
2. If you were Jesus, why would you want to give the Pope the gift of infallibility?
3. How can you show your respect for the authority entrusted to the Church by Jesus?

5 | conclude

- With your child, pray the Our Father.

6 | follow up

During the week, do at least one of the following activities with your child:

1. Memorize John 8:32.
2. As a family, watch a movie about the life of Blessed John Paul II.
3. During family prayers, pray for the Pope and your bishop.

You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.
—John 8:32

notes
