

Infallibility

The word *infallibility* means freedom from error. It does not mean that the pope or members of the Church are sinless or incapable of making mistakes. Rather, it refers to the Church's belief that the Holy Spirit protects the Church from error when definitively teaching matters of faith and morals. Because Christ remains with his Church and has given the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Church can confidently proclaim the truths necessary for our salvation. In this sense, infallibility is less about the authority of individuals and more about God's faithfulness to the Church.

The Church teaches that this gift belongs first to the whole People of God. Vatican II reminds us that the faithful, guided by the Holy Spirit, share in the Church's understanding of the faith, often called the *sensus fidei*, or sense of the faith. At the same time, Christ entrusted a special teaching responsibility to the bishops in union with the pope. Most often, infallibility is exercised through the ordinary teaching of the bishops throughout the world when they are united in teaching a doctrine that is to be definitively held by the faithful. In more solemn circumstances, infallibility may be exercised by an ecumenical council or by the pope speaking *ex cathedra* on a matter of faith or morals intended for the entire Church.

It is important to understand that infallibility does not give the Church the ability to create new doctrines. Rather, it is a gift that enables the Church to faithfully preserve, interpret, and proclaim the revelation given in Jesus Christ. Any infallible teaching must be rooted in Scripture and Tradition and remain consistent with the faith handed down through the centuries. Ultimately, the doctrine of infallibility reflects the Church's trust that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church in truth, ensuring that the Gospel is faithfully proclaimed in every age.