



MEMORIZE *the* **REASONS!**

Defending the Faith with the
Catholic Art of Memory

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Chapter 1

Rocky I: The Primacy of Peter

*So you are Simon the son of John?
You shall be called "Cephas" (which means Peter).
John 1:42*

*The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter,
the "rock" of his Church.
Catechism of the Catholic Church (881)*

Christ told us that the wise man builds his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24), so that though the rains may come, and the floods, wind, and heat, his house will remain standing. Surely this is why Christ himself, the embodiment of God's wisdom, built his Church upon the man he had named "Rock." And indeed, despite 2,000 years of braving the elements, and through the rise and fall of nations and civilizations, the house of God that Jesus built upon Peter still stands.

We recall from the introduction that Peter was the *rock* upon whom the Church was built, was handed the *keys* to the kingdom, was made *captain* of the barque of the Church, the Church's *source of strength* and chief *shepherd*, that he was *first* amongst the apostles, *leader* of all Christians, and the first to *preach* the Gospel, and how his early successors wrote *letters of guidance* to other bishops, as it was acknowledged from the start that he was the *foundation of the Church*.

But now it is time to go further. So join me as we return to the façade of St. Peter's memory cathedral. Of course, you see the rock again, the rock upon which the Church

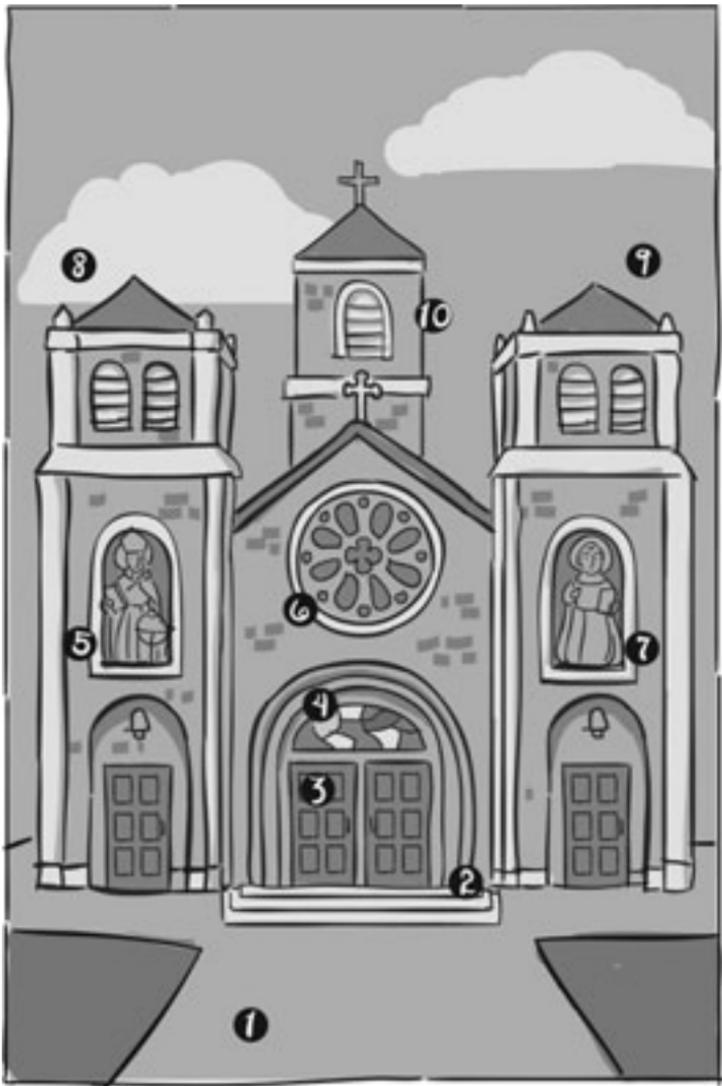
was built, but now you're aware of a supernatural presence as well. Standing next to you on the piazza outside of St. Peter's is a *winged man*, the representation of the evangelist, *St. Matthew*.

From the days of the early Church Fathers, the four evangelists have been connected with and symbolized by the four creatures described in Revelation 4:7 as surrounding the throne of God and ceaselessly singing his praises. St. Matthew was associated with the human-looking creature, because his Gospel provides Christ's genealogy and focuses on his Incarnation in human form. The reason he's here, at location 1, is that the verse in which Christ calls Peter "rock" and foretells that his Church will be built upon him is in *St. Matthew's* Gospel, verse 16:18 to be exact.

Remember that for now we will focus on the names of the books from which our core reasons come. But pay close attention to chapter and verse as we go along—this will give you a head start if you choose later to make use of a number/letter conversion system for locking them in your memory.

And speaking of locks, it's time to make sure that we haven't forgotten our keys! As you walk to the top of the steps (2) and see the golden key, imagine that *the angelic figure of St. Matthew* has now handed that key to you (as Christ had handed it to Peter). For in the very next verse (16:19), Jesus promises to give Peter the keys of the kingdom. Got that?

Next you head toward that front door (3) with the captain standing inside, except now you notice that he happens to be sitting upon a *winged ox*! How did that escape our attention the first time through? Anyway, he's sitting on an ox, of course, because it is in the Gospel of *St. Luke* (5:3–10) that Jesus spoke from Simon's boat and made him the captain and chief fisher of men as well.



St. Peter's Cathedral

Ancient Christians associated Luke with the winged ox of Revelation (and Ezekiel 1) for many reasons, including the fact that the ox was a symbol of sacrifice, and Luke's Gospel starts with the ministrations of Zechariah in the Jewish temple. Luke also emphasizes Christ's own sacrifice and the need for sacrifice among Christians who would follow him. For now, let's be sure to recall that *our captain is riding that ox representing St. Luke.*

On now to location 4, to the window over the door that depicts the mighty Samson. Do you recall the legend of Paul Bunyan and Babe, his blue ox? Well, let's give Samson *an ox* of his own. Of course, Samson's ox won't be blue, but then again, it will have wings. And Samson won't be carrying an ax like Paul Bunyan either, since the jawbone of an ass served his purposes. The ox, of course, represents *St. Luke* again, since it is in his chapter 22, verse 32, that Jesus himself prayed that Simon's faith would not fail and would serve to strengthen others.



Above that first window and over to the left (5), you'll recall the statue of St. Albert the Great conversing with a shepherd, since Christ had told Peter to "feed my sheep."

But did you notice that upon Albert's head sat a great *eagle*? There he is now. The eagle soars high and can look at the sun. It has also long represented *St. John*, for what other evangelist starts his Gospel with as lofty a subject as Christ's eternal existence as the *Logos*, the Word of God? It is, of course, *St. John*, who also tells us that the Word-made-flesh made Peter his chief shepherd, emphatically telling him after his Resurrection to feed his sheep (21:15–17).

Immediately to the right of *St. Albert* is the great rose window (6), depicting the first-place trophy. But now you note that sticking out of the trophy is a very well-thumbed *New Testament*, brimming over with 195 bright yellow sticky notes! Someone has opened two packages of 100 and placed all but five of them in the *New Testament*. One sticky note remains stuck on each finger of the hand that placed them there. This serves to remind us that evidence of Peter's primacy among the apostles is distributed among all of the Gospels and four other books of the *New Testament* as well (*Acts*, *Galatians*, 1 and 2 *Peter*). Those 195 sticky notes remind us how many times Peter's name (including mentions as *Simon* and *Cephas*) appears in the *New Testament*. (And by the way, in "second place" is *St. John*, the evangelist and "beloved disciple," whose name receives forty-eight honorable mentions. The names of the rest of Christ's apostles combined are mentioned but 130 times.)¹⁵

On now to the statue of the great Angelic Doctor, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (7), where he's chatting with *King St. Louis*. Imagine the good king is back from a crusade, still wielding an enormous ax. This ax will remind you of the book of *Acts*, since this book on the history of the early Church depicts Peter in a leadership role many times. See,

15 Armstrong, *A Biblical Defense of Catholicism*, p. 236.

for example, chapter 15, in which Peter led the first council of Jerusalem, the episcopal see of the apostle James. Peter proclaimed that the Mosaic Law was not binding on the Gentile converts, because both Jews and Gentiles were saved through the grace of Christ. And after Peter spoke, the matter ended. There was no further debate.

Up now to the left bell tower (8), our great orator gives his speech. This orator of course is St. Peter himself, and let's imagine him wielding an *ax* as well, since it was reported in *Acts 2:14* that after Pentecost, Peter was the first man to preach Christ's good news.

Over now to the bell tower on the right (9) and here we see our mailman, but now you realize that this very tall and unseemly mailman looks a lot like the friendly Frankenstein monster, *Herman Munster*! You notice as well there's a *lamb* resting around his large, bolted neck. Herman is a grotesque reminder of the early Church Father named *Hermas*. In his ancient text *The Shepherd*, he related that it was the duty of the bishop of Rome to send letters to other churches throughout the world.

Now, last for us, but not least (indeed, not really last either, since so many Church Fathers attested to Peter's primacy), is location 10, the central spire, with Atlas holding the heavens. We recall that Atlas stands for Peter, for the Church was built upon him. Now, in an ancient Hindu system of cosmology, the earth ultimately rested on the back of an enormous turtle. For our image then, we're going to mix a bit of Western and Eastern mythology and depict Atlas standing on the back of a *turtle*, because the early Father who wrote that the Church was built upon Peter was none other than *Tertullian*. Oh, and let's picture Atlas wearing a *wedding ring*, because that book of Tertullian's was entitled *Monogamy*.

All right, do you have our last batch of images now? If not, please go over them one more time in the text or in the

table below. Pay special attention to the images that appear more than once. Note that the winged man is there at the piazza and the steps, that both our captain and Samson ride an ox, and that both St. Louis and the orator are wielding mighty axes. How easy this makes it to recall the sources of six of our ten reasons for Peter's primacy, these coming from the Gospels of Sts. Matthew and Luke and the book of Acts.

THE PRIMACY OF PETER: THE REASONS AND THEIR SOURCES

	LOCATION	IMAGES	REASON/SOURCE
1.	End of piazza	<i>Giant rock</i> <i>Winged man</i>	Christ tells Peter he is the rock upon which he will build his Church (Matt. 16:18).
2.	Top of steps	<i>Golden key</i> <i>Winged man</i>	Christ gives Peter the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind and loose (Matt. 16:19).
3.	Front central door	<i>Naval captain</i> <i>Winged ox</i>	Christ teaches from Peter's boat and tells Peter he will be "catching men" (Luke 5:3-4, 10).
4.	Stained glass window	<i>Samson</i> <i>Winged ox</i>	Christ prays that Peter's faith will strengthen the brethren (Luke 22:32).
5.	St. Albert statue	<i>Shepherd</i> <i>Eagle (winged, of course!)</i>	Christ tells Peter three times, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).
6.	Rose window	<i>First-place trophy</i> <i>New Testament with 195 sticky notes</i>	Peter's name (also in the form of Simon and Cephas) occurs 195 times in eight books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Galatians, 1 and 2 Peter.
7.	St. Thomas Aquinas statue	<i>Leader (King St. Louis IX of France)</i> <i>Ax</i>	Peter takes charge after debate among the apostles as God had chosen him to do (Acts 15:7).
8.	Left bell tower	<i>Orator</i> <i>Ax</i>	Peter is first to proclaim the gospel at Pentecost (Acts 2:14).

9.	Right bell tower	<i>Mailman Herman/sheep</i>	Peter's successor St. Clement of Rome noted to have duty to send letters to churches abroad (Hermas, <i>The Shepherd</i> , "Visions" Chapter 2.4.3).
10.	Central spire	<i>Atlas Turtle/ wedding ring</i>	The Church described as "built upon [Peter]" (Tertullian, <i>Monogamy</i> , 8.4).

An Exercise in Absurdity?

We've given our memories quite a workout already, and maybe you're concerned that we could be overtraining—wondering if your memory muscles are really up to this task. Do you doubt that you can really remember all these crazy images? And why must they be so absurd?

First off, yes, you *can* remember all of these images with moderate effort. We will use the same basic locations throughout the remainder of the book, and the more you practice the method, the faster and easier you will recall them. As St. Thomas tells us, habits become as a "second nature." So I urge you to carry on and make memory training a regular habit. As the wise author of the oldest extant memory treatise advised his ancient Roman readers:

In every discipline artistic theory is of little avail without unremitting exercise, but especially in mnemonics theory is almost valueless unless made good by industry, devotion, toil, and care. You can make sure that you have as many backgrounds as possible and that these conform as much as possible to the rules; in placing the images you should exercise every day.

While an engrossing preoccupation may often distract us from our other pursuits, from this activity nothing

whatever can divert us. . . . So, since a ready memory is a useful thing, you see clearly with what great pains we must strive to acquire so useful a faculty. Once you know its uses you will be able to appreciate this advice.¹⁶

Rome wasn't built in a day, and our memory cathedrals won't be either, but every day we get out there and build, they will rise a little higher and stand a little more steady.

As for the absurdity of the images: Memory masters have long been aware that *memory images function best when they are strange or exaggerated*. We encounter so many objects, events, and bits of information every waking second that we cannot remember all of them. The ordinary ones tend to get lost in the shuffle, while the unusual, the fantastic, capture our imaginations and get stored in our memories.

This is why St. Thomas wrote that the first thing we should do to remember something is to “take some suitable yet somewhat unwonted illustration of it, since the unwonted strikes us more, and so makes a greater and stronger impression on the mind.”¹⁷ Unwonted means unusual, and in the original Latin, Thomas uses the word *miramur* to describe these images—things at which we marvel or wonder. St. Albert also drives home this point, advising us to make our images “as striking as possible,” to picture them “doing something” and having “exceptional beauty or ugliness.”¹⁸

As we progress through these pages, I will supply all the mnemonic images you need, but *feel free to substitute images of your own at any time*. For example, at location seven I chose the image of St. Louis, king of France, to remind us of a

16 Cicero, *Ad Herennium*, p. 223.

17 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 49, a1.

18 From De Bono (*On the Good*), cited in Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 275.

leader. But your image could be anyone *you* think of as a leader, or, for that matter, it could be based on a homonym or pun—someone holding a *liter* of soda, or, if you happen to be a fan of classic Bavarian attire, a German decked out in *lederhosen*. So, if any images I supply don't seem "as striking as possible" to you, substitute your own, so long as they trigger the reason you're trying to remember. This is the art of memory. Feel free to be the artist.

And here's more good news for your memory muscles. As this book progresses, your memory burden will lighten. The *same forty locations* you will learn to memorize forty reasons for our beliefs about the papacy and the Church will also be used to lock in forty reasons for our beliefs about the Blessed Virgin Mary, and another forty reasons about our beliefs about the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Memory cathedrals can hold all kinds of treasures!

Mnemonic images, too, are handy tools that can be used again and again. This is not the last time that we'll use the symbols of the man, ox, and eagle for Matthew, Luke, and John. (Soon we'll encounter St. Mark's symbol too, and we'll see why he's so leonine.) And any time you imagine an ax, for example, you'll know that the verse or the scene or the lesson you see was presented in the book of Acts.

And so I hope you will be encouraged by the words of Albert and Thomas, and pursue memory mastery with diligence. It's an "exercise in absurdity" that pays off with profound results.

Second Rehearse, Same As the First

Now, back in the days when I did daily testing of people's memories at a neuropsychology laboratory, I saw that true memory retention was found in a person's capacity to hold

on to new information *after a delay*. If you have read along the last few pages, it has been at least a few minutes since you last tried to recall the reasons and sources placed on St. Peter's façade. So now let's review these ten reasons we have learned and memorized about the primacy of Peter.

Test yourself, please. Do you still have them? Can you recite the reasons and the books they come from literally forward and backward, from one to ten and from ten to one? That's great if you can, but if you can't, recall that repetition is the mother of memory. Review and rehearse them one more time, and soon I think you'll be able to say, "By George (or by Peter), I do believe I've got them!"

Now it is time to move from the façade and to prepare to see what lies within our mnemonic cathedral of St. Peter.

Memorable Quotation 1

Painting Pictures in Our Minds

Now the reason for the necessity of finding these illustrations or images is that simple and spiritual impressions easily slip from the mind, unless they be tied as it were to some corporeal image, because human knowledge has a greater hold on sensible objects.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 49. a. 1.

St. Thomas knew well the power of visual images, and his own memory powers were prodigious. Aristotle, the man Thomas called simply “the Philosopher,” wrote that “the soul never thinks without an image.” St. Thomas knew as well that when the ancient Greek poet Simonides discovered the ancient art of “artificial memory” in the fifth century B.C., he based it upon *the crucial role that visual images play in our power to remember*. It was Simonides, remember, who described poetry as “painting with words.” In the pages ahead, we will take some very important words from Scripture and the Church Fathers and use them to *paint pictures in our minds*, pictures that will be resistant to fading and easy to touch up, should the need arise!

As we embark on this course of memorable apologetics, these visible, external, pen-and-ink illustrations will play a crucial role—indeed, if you feel the need, you are welcome to grab a pad and a pencil to draw your own pictures of images that we don’t supply. Note well, though, that higher human psychological functions (like a trained memory) follow an “inward path.” The more proficient you become with this technique, the less you will depend upon these

external illustrations, as the images and locations become engraved in the recesses of your own mind. I hope you will follow along and join me, then, on this inward path. And since we are addressing important truths of our Catholic Faith, our path will be not only inward but upward.