

## What is meant by the “Holy See”?

Of course it is the Holy See, and not the Holy C, or the Holy Sea. The noun *see* comes from the Latin word *sedes* which means seat. A see is simply the seat of authority of a bishop over his diocese. The archdiocesan offices downtown are essentially the seat of the authority for Cardinal Maida and would be considered his see. Another word for seat is chair, which in Latin is *cathedra* from which we get *cathedral*. Each diocese has a cathedral which contains the bishop’s official throne from which he guides the local community entrusted to his care. In the Archdiocese of Detroit, for example, we have Blessed Sacrament Cathedral.

The Holy See is essentially another term for the Vatican, the see of the pope who is the Bishop of Rome. The cathedral of the Bishop of Rome is the Basilica of St. John Lateran, not St. Peter’s Basilica. When Pope Benedict XVI sits in the chair in his cathedral, he speaks with special authority. We say that he speaks *ex cathedra*, from the chair. And when he does so, he speaks infallibly. This was defined at the First Vatican Council in 1870: “We teach and define that it is a dogma Divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves and not from the consent of the Church irreformable.”

**Deacon Joe**