On February 22nd each year, the Church celebrates the feast of the Chair of St. Peter. This might seem odd, as the church doesn't venerate furniture. There's no feast of the end-tables of St. Cyprian, or feast of the sofa of St. Andrew. So, what's with the chair?

In pre-Christian Rome, the feast of Parentalia (celebrated in the third week of February) commemorated deceased relatives and friends, and it was traditional to leave an empty chair at the table in their honor. This empty chair has parallels in many other faiths, including Judaism. Christianity, in its early centuries, often established feasts and holiday that coincided with—and generally supplanted—the celebrations of the larger culture.

As early as the 4th Century, there is evidence of a Christian feast celebrating the Chair of Peter. The significance isn't the chair itself, but rather the authority it represents. The Latin word for chair, *cathedra*, is where we get the word cathedral. And when a pope speaks a pronouncement with his full authority as head of the Church, he is said to speak "ex cathedra" or, "from the chair." So, when we observe the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, we're celebrating the office of the pope as the authoritative head of the Church.

As for St. Peter's original chair, it is represented in St. Peter's basilica in Rome by an elaborate sculpture by Bernini. The relics of the chair itself are in the Vatican treasury, and not on public display. Those relics were given to the Vatican in the year 875 by King Charles II of France.

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**PRAYER FOR CIVIC LEADERS**

In Celebration of Presidents' Day
February 17, 2020

God our Father,
You guide everything in wisdom and love.
Accept the prayers we offer for our nation.
In your goodness,
watch over those in authority
so that people everywhere
may enjoy freedom, security and peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

—From *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*