

The Next Pope

Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit for the Conclave

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Update: As of a few hours ago, we have a pope: Cardinal Robert Prevost, taking the name Leo XIV. The first 2 major surprises were 1) how fast the Conclave went and 2) that we have the first American pope!

These past few weeks, the Cardinals of the Catholic Church have been discussing the needs of the Church and who best to lead it. Yesterday, the 133 voting cardinals under 80 entered the conclave.

In an interview soon after the death of Pope Francis, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York shared his thoughts on who the next pope should be. In his opinion, he thought the next pope should combine the best of the last three popes. He called to mind the vigor and fortitude of Pope John Paul II, the intellect of Pope Benedict, and the heart and style of Pope Francis. His comments were very inspirational, but reminded me of a saying on what people often want when they are getting a new bishop- 'we want Jesus Christ himself with an MBA from Harvard' and even then, they still might not like him! The point is, we can be too idealistic in

times like this. We must remember that the pope is a human being.

Today, we gather for a Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, meaning the readings and prayers are all focused on the Holy Spirit. We believe that it is the Holy Spirit who ultimately leads the Church—not the humans, not even the pope. This understanding was reintroduced into the Roman Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council. Prior to the council, most Roman Catholics would have said that the pope is the source of unity and the leader of the Church. The Holy Spirit was mainly called upon to serve as a placeholder between popes. This is not accurate. The Holy Spirit is always present, always giving inspiration and life to the Church. The papacy, while essential, must be understood as secondary to this reality. **Update:** *I know Pope Leo XIV understands this quite well.*

In our Gospel selected for this evening's mass, the Risen Christ is preparing to return to the Father in heaven. Before his departure, he acknowledged the grief of his followers. Instead of feeding into their grief, however, he turned his soon to be absence into words of encouragement: "I tell you the truth, it is better that I go. For if I do not go, the advocate will not come to you." In other words, without him, his followers would learn to be more dependent upon the Holy Spirit. They would have to live in faith

and trust, which was the whole point of Jesus' life. Just as Jesus followed the Holy Spirit's lead, so must the Church.

The Holy Spirit is always the protagonist (Pope Francis) of the Church.

How much do I trust the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church? How can I use this opportunity to renew my own responsibilities as a member of the Catholic Church?

As we continue with this mass, let us pray to the Holy Spirit for our new pope, who may not be Jesus Christ with an MBA from Harvard (**Update:** *although sort of close for Cardinal Prevost*), but who will be open to the Holy Spirit. **Update:** *He already mentioned Pope Francis and the Synod from the balcony, which are good indications of his vision. At the same time, we understand that he will be different than Pope Francis and his own person.* In the days ahead, may we be open to a new pope with a different set of strengths and with a different set of limitations. He is a human being just like all of us.