

# A conclave is about God's faithfulness to his promise

The historic events soon to take place in Rome will be at their deepest core Christian events: the choosing and installation of a successor to St. Peter as universal head of the Church. There has been widespread interest in the Catholic Church in recent weeks due to Pope Benedict's decision to resign because of age, interest spanning continents and religions, languages and cultures.

Why is a conclave held "in secret," with cardinals sequestered behind Vatican walls and out of our range of vision? Because what takes place is a spiritual event designed to be held before the eyes of God alone.

Is it a matter of cardinals making a choice which they then ask God to bless? To the contrary, it is a matter of their prayerfully asking to be led by the Holy Spirit to vote according to God's will.

That is the Christian approach: to say to God, "Father, show us your way." Through the 2,000-year history of the Church, this question has been prayerfully asked time and again, and God has always answered in faithfulness and love.

## A time of prayer, trust

No doubt there will be many analyses and interpretations of the election of a new pope. But a conclave is about God's faithfulness to the promise he made in his Son, Jesus: that he would send the Holy Spirit to remind us of all that Jesus taught and keep us faithful to him. That is what the cardinals pray for as they prepare for the vote. "Father, show us the one whom you have chosen through your Holy Spirit to lead us in faithfulness to your Son."

The conclave is a time of both prayer and trust: trust that God truly knows what we need, trust that he will never



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fail us. We trust that God would never lead astray the flock his Son purchased at the price of his blood, and that is why time after time, century after century, the Church turns to him in prayer and says, "Father, show us your way. We trust in you."

During the past weeks, my thoughts have turned often to our pope emeritus, Benedict XVI. He spent a good part of his life delving into the mystery of Christ as a theologian, professor and bishop, tasks which require humility above all else.

Theologians must be among the most humble, because they stand before the deepest truths hoping to understand and explain them better to God's people. Benedict's words the day of his election in 2005 gave a clear hint as to his perspective on current events:

"Dear brothers and sisters ... the cardinals have elected me, a simple, humble

worker in God's vineyard. I am consoled by the fact that the Lord knows how to work and how to act, even with insufficient tools, and I especially trust in your prayers. In the joy of the resurrected Lord, trustful of his permanent help, we go forward,

sure that God will help. And Mary, his most beloved Mother, stands on our side."

## God knows best

These were simple Christian words which are equally true for you and me, because they are based on trust in God's

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promises. In an expansive, universal fashion the coming conclave will demonstrate how we are to approach every decision in life: "Father, show us your way."

That is a prayer for praying when we are ready to submit to God in trust and humility. God knows what is best for the Church and will never fail her. God knows what is best for you and me, and he will never fail us.

Back in the 12th century, St. Bernard of Clairvaux offered advice in the form of a lengthy book to one of his monks who had been elected pope. Toward the end of the work, he wrote to Pope Eugene III:

"Do you think you can find work to be done in the field of your Lord? Much indeed. Certainly the prophets could not correct everything. They left something for their sons, the apostles, to do; and they, your parents, have left something for you. But you cannot do everything. For you will leave something to your successor, and he to others, and they to others until the end of time."

"Until the end of time." Jesus promised that he is with us always "until the end of time." You and I have been placed in this period of history as his disciples and given the task of doing our part to spread his kingdom.

We will be given a new pope, a new successor to St. Peter, to shepherd us along the way of Jesus. We will offer him our prayers, our ears, our hearts, and our obedience as he guides us along the way of Jesus.

**The coming conclave will demonstrate how we are to approach every decision in life: "Father, show us your way."**