

# Pope Francis leads us with Christ to the Father

One of my prized possessions is the yellowed front page of an old newspaper. Carefully preserved by my father, the August 15, 1945, edition of *The Oklahoman* proclaims "PEACE!" in bright red letters 6 inches tall. It was the end of World War II, at long last a time for the reunification of millions of families like ours.

I grew up and learned to read not that many years after the war ended, and even though the events of the war were fresh in the memories of my family and our copy of *The Oklahoman* still crisp and white, I sensed as a kid that the front page I held in my hands was worthy of my father's careful handling.

Grateful for having that important fragment of history, as a young man I began preserving the front pages of newspapers announcing historic news, some of it joyous and some tragic. I keep them in a box wrapped tightly with tape and a label that reads "Newspapers."

I opened it again Sunday afternoon.

## 'Prima fumata nera'

Inside I found a stack of newspapers, many of which I had not seen in years. Today I am grateful I had the presence of mind to spirit them away. The box is a kind of time capsule of my adult life: presidential and mayoral elections, wars, visits of famous persons, the appointment of the bishops under whom I served in Tennessee and, of course, Sept. 11, 2001.

Sunday it did not take me long, rifling through the box toward the bottom, to find what I was looking for: headlines I had read as a newly ordained priest beginning my final year of study in Rome.

L'Osservatore Romano, Vatican City, Oct. 16, 1978. "I Cardinali in Conclave per l'elezione del Papa — Prima fumata nera." "The Cardinals in Conclave for the Election of the Pope — First cloud of smoke black."

Il Messaggero, Rome, Oct. 17, 1978. "Dopo Quattro secoli e mezzo eletto un Pontefice non italiano — Il nuovo



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Papa è polacco — Si chiamerà Giovanni Paolo II — È il cardinale di Cracovia Karol Wojtyła — Ha cinquantotto anni." "After four and a half centuries a non-Italian Pontiff elected — The New Pope is Polish — He will be called John Paul II — He is the Cardinal of Krakow Karol Wojtyła — He is 58 years old."

The Daily American, Rome, Oct. 17, 1978. "6:18 pm — White smoke — World welcomes Pope of hope — John Paul II." An article toward the bottom of the page bears the headline, "Surprise choice considered middle-of-the-road."

When Blessed John Paul died, I was the bishop of Little Rock, and I placed in my box the April 3, 2005, edition of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* with its huge banner headline: "John Paul II era ends."

## Another new 'era'?

When I kept copies of those Roman newspapers more than 34 years ago, I did not know that someday I would read a headline calling the pontificate of Blessed John Paul II an "era" — nor did I know that I would eventually place in my box newspapers announcing the election of two more popes, Benedict XVI and now, Francis.

Headlines in the March 14, 2013, edition of *The Seattle Times* read somewhat like those 1978 newspapers: "Pope of Many Firsts — Choice of Argentine

signals a shift in church." "Cardinals break the mold with choice — New pontiff 'from the end of the world.'" "Selection of a Jesuit from Latin America 'speaks volumes.'" "Quiet intellectual becomes first pope from the Americas."

Pope Francis has already given clear glimpses of his personality and priori-



White smoke billows from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel March 13 at the Vatican after cardinals elected Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio the 266th Roman Catholic pontiff.

ties — a man of simple tastes and simple habits, he loves the poor and teaches others to do the same. A humble man of prayer, he asks us to pray for and with him. A warm man of faith, he gently greets people on the street as father and brother.

Another new "era"? Perhaps in one sense, but in a deeper sense not — for Pope Francis is with us, in the time of Christ, to lead us with Christ to the Father.

The "surprise choice" headlines in the newspapers of October 1978 and March 2013 are reasons for hope. The Holy Spirit guided the Cardinals in conclave last week, fulfilling once again Jesus' promise that he would not leave the Church — or the world — orphan.

You won't be surprised to learn that on Sunday afternoon I placed the March 14 edition of *The Seattle Times* in the box labeled "Newspapers."

Pope Francis, you have our love, our prayers, and our obedience.

## DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN'S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.