

## NEW POPE

# Conclave secrecy from Extra omnes to Habemus papam

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From this afternoon, Wednesday 7 May, there will be silence and total secrecy about what will happen between the closing of the doors of the Sistine Chapel and the reopening of the central loggia of St Peter's for the first appearance of the new Pope.

The first mystery of the conclave is its duration: we know when it begins, but not when it ends. At best, we can make an estimate: on average, it lasts a few days. The shortest was the one that elected Julius II in a single night in 1503. The longest and most difficult election was that of Viterbo between 1268 and 1271, which was not called a 'conclave' at the time, but literally became one when the people of Viterbo locked the cardinals in (*cum clave*) so that they could come to a decision. It was then the elected Pope, Blessed Gregory X, who regulated what has since been called the 'conclave' with the Apostolic Constitution *Ubi periculum*.

**Two public ceremonies will precede the election:** in the morning, the **Mass pro eligendo Romano Pontifice** will be celebrated by the Cardinal Dean Giovanni Battista Re (who, being over 80 years old, will then hand over the presidency of the Conclave to Cardinal Parolin), while at 4.15 p.m. the Cardinal electors, accompanied by the Litany of the Saints, will go from the Pauline Chapel to the Sistine Chapel. Here they will invoke the Holy Spirit with the *Veni Creator*, after which they will **swear** "that whichever of us is chosen by God to be Roman Pontiff, he will undertake to faithfully exercise the Petrine ministry of shepherd of the universal Church", in addition, of course, to maintain the secrecy of the conclave and its freedom from any interference. Then each of the electors go to the Book of the Gospels and add: *Et ego, N. cardinalis N., spondeo, voveo ac iuro. Sic me Deo audivet et haec Sancta Dei Evangelia, quae manu mea tango* ("And I, N. Cardinal N., promise, pledge and swear. May God help me and these Holy Gospels which I touch with my hand").

**It is now time for the "Extra omnes"** ("Everyone out") announced by the master of liturgical celebrations, Monsignor Diego Ravelli. Monsignors, prelates and anyone else who had been admitted up to that point leaves. Above all, the cameras leave. Only the Master and the preacher (Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, over 80 years old) remain inside, with the task of giving the electors a final meditation on the grave responsibility that awaits them (because the Spirit inspires them, but certainly does not take away the responsibility that falls on their shoulders). They will leave the Sistine Chapel and remain in total seclusion, except for meals and overnight stays in Santa Marta. But no one outside will see them again until the election of the Pope.

**The final image will show them under Michelangelo's Last Judgement**, seated at long tables, each with their own place according to the order of precedence. A brief historical note: until 1963, when the conclaves were less numerous, the tables were replaced by benches covered by canopies. When the "mission" was accomplished, only the newly elected Pope's chair and canopy remained, while all the others were taken

down in homage to the new Pope. This evocative scene can be seen in some film reconstructions, such as the 1968 film *The Man from the Kremlin*, starring Anthony Quinn.

**But how is the election held?** There are two rounds of voting in the morning and two in the afternoon, except on the day of entry, when there is only time for one. Each voter writes the name of their candidate on a ballot paper with the words: '*Eligo in Summum Pontificem ...*'. When the ballot paper is placed in the ballot box on the table of the scrutineers, a new oath reminds the voters of their responsibility: "I call upon Christ the Lord, who will judge me, to witness that my vote is given to the person whom I believe should be elected according to God". At the end of each ballot, the votes are counted and if no candidate has obtained a two-thirds majority (89 votes out of 133), the process is repeated. Even in the case of an extension, the two-thirds majority will be maintained, in accordance with the recent changes made by Benedict XVI.

**The only sign of the vote's outcome will be the smoke rising from the Sistine Chapel's famous chimney:** black if the election has failed, white if the Pope has been elected. One, certainly black, will already be seen tonight, no earlier than 7 p.m. Two more will follow, one after each of the two votes in the morning and the two in the afternoon. The smoke will be released early and will inevitably be white if one of the two intermediate ballots (mid-morning or mid-afternoon) has been successful. Since 2005, the white smoke has been accompanied by the ringing of the basilica bells, to dispel any doubt as to its colour.

**Once elected, the candidate must answer the fateful question** posed by the Dean or his representative (unless the elected candidate is the Dean himself, as was the case with Dean Ratzinger in 2005): '*Acceptasne electionem de te canonice factam in Summum Pontificem*' ('Do you accept your election as Supreme Pontiff?'). If he accepts, the next question is: '*Quo nomine vis vocari?*' ('By what name do you wish to be called?'). He is led into the *Room of Tears* (the sacristy of the Sistine Chapel, so called because it is here that the new pontiff vents his emotions), where he takes off his cardinal's robes forever and puts on the papal vestments. After receiving the first homage from the Sacred College, he goes to Saint Peter's balcony to present himself to the faithful and to give the first blessing *Urbi et Orbi*. But before him appears the Cardinal Protodeacon Dominique Mamberti (unless he is the one elected), whose task is to proclaim the *Habemus papam*, announcing to the crowd who the new Pope is and the pontifical name chosen.

**It is appropriate to say "a name, is a programme"** because the reference to a particular saint or predecessor (or an unprecedented choice) allows us to anticipate

something about the direction the pontificate will take, in addition, of course, to the first words he addresses to the faithful. It is easier to guess which name he will definitely not choose. No Pope has ever dared to take the name of Peter out of respect.