

# Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino and the Servant of God Nino Baglieri

*Monsignor Giuseppe Malandrino, the ninth Bishop of the Noto diocese, returned to the House of the Father on 3 August 2025, the day on which the feast of the Patron Saint of the Diocese of Noto, Mary Ladder of Paradise, is celebrated. 94 years of age, 70 years of priesthood and 45 years of episcopal consecration are respectable numbers for a man who served the Church as a Shepherd with “the smell of the sheep” as Pope Francis often emphasised.*

## **Lightning rod of humanity**

During his experience as pastor of the Diocese of Noto (1906.1998 – 1507.2007), he had the opportunity to cultivate his friendship with the Servant of God Nino Baglieri. He almost never missed a “stop” at Nino’s house when pastoral reasons took him to Modica. In one of his testimonies, Monsignor Malandrino says: “...finding myself at Nino’s bedside, I had the vivid perception that this beloved sick brother of ours was truly a “lightning rod of humanity”, according to a concept of sufferers so dear to me and which I also wanted to propose in the Pastoral Letter on the permanent mission *You will be my witnesses*” (2003). Monsignor Malandrino writes: “It is necessary to recognise in the sick and suffering, the face of the suffering Christ and to assist them with the same care and with the same love of Jesus in His passion, lived in a spirit of obedience to the Father and in solidarity with his brothers”. This was fully embodied by Nino’s dearest mother, Mrs. Peppina. She, a typical Sicilian woman, with a strong character and great determination. She replies to the doctor who proposes euthanasia for her son (given his serious health conditions and the prospect of a life as a paralytic), “if the Lord wants him, he will take him, but if he leaves him to me

like this, I am happy to look after him for life.” Was Nino’s mother aware of what she was going to face at that moment? Was Mary, the mother of Jesus, aware of how much pain she would have to suffer for the Son of God? The answer, when read with human eyes, does not seem easy, especially in our 21<sup>st</sup> century society where everything is unstable, fluctuating, consumed in an “instant”. Mamma Peppina’s Fiat became, like Mary’s, a Yes of Faith and adherence to that will of God which finds fulfilment in knowing how to carry the Cross, in knowing how to give “soul and body” to the realisation of God’s Plan.

### **From suffering to joy**

The friendship between Nino and Monsignor Malandrino was already underway when the latter was still bishop of Acireale. In fact, as early as 1993, through Father Attilio Balbinot, a Camillian very close to Nino, he presented him with his first book, “From suffering to joy”. In Nino’s experience, the relationship with the Bishop of his diocese was one of total filiation. From the moment he accepted God’s Plan for him, he made his “active” presence felt by offering his sufferings for the Church, the Pope, and the Bishops (as well as priests and missionaries). This relationship of filiation was renewed annually on 6 May, the day of his fall, later seen as the mysterious beginning of a rebirth. On 8 May 2004, a few days after Nino celebrated the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cross, Monsignor Malandrino went to his house. In memory of that meeting, he writes in his memoirs, “it is always a great joy every time I see him and I receive so much energy and strength to carry my Cross and offer it with so much Love for the needs of the Holy Church and in particular for my Bishop and for our Diocese. May the Lord always give him more holiness to guide us for many years always with more ardour and love...”. Again: “... the Cross is heavy but the Lord gives me so many Graces that make suffering less bitter and it becomes light and sweet; the Cross becomes a Gift, offered to the Lord with so much Love for the salvation of souls and the Conversion of

Sinners...". Finally, it should be emphasised how, on these occasions of grace, the pressing and constant request for "help to become a Saint with the daily Cross" was never lacking. Nino, in fact, absolutely wanted to become a saint.

### **An anticipated beatification**

Moments of great significance in this sense were the funeral of the Servant of God on 3 March 2007, when Monsignor Malandrino himself, at the beginning of the Eucharistic Celebration, devoutly bent down, albeit with difficulty, to kiss the coffin containing Nino's mortal remains. It was an homage to a man who had lived 39 years of his existence in a body that "did not feel" but which radiated joy of life in every way. Monsignor Malandrino emphasised that the celebration of the Mass, in the Salesian courtyard which had become an open-air "cathedral" for the occasion, had been an authentic apotheosis (thousands of people participated in tears) and it was clearly and communally perceived that they were not in front of a funeral, but a true "beatification". Nino, with his testimony of life, had in fact become a point of reference for many, young and old, lay people and consecrated persons, mothers and fathers of families, who, thanks to his precious testimony, were able to read their own existence and find answers that they could not find elsewhere. Monsignor Malandrino also repeatedly emphasised this aspect: "in fact, every encounter with the dearest Nino was for me, as for everyone, a strong and vivid experience of edification and a powerful – in its sweetness – spur to patient and generous giving. The presence of the Bishop gave him immense joy every time because, in addition to the affection of the friend who came to visit him, he perceived the ecclesial communion. It is obvious that what I received from him was always much more than the little I could give him." Nino's fixed "obsession" was to "become a saint"; having fully lived and embodied the Gospel of Joy in Suffering, with his physical ailments and his total gift for the beloved Church, ensured that everything did not end with his departure to the Heavenly Jerusalem, but

continued, as Monsignor Malandrino emphasised at the funeral. “... Nino’s mission now also continues through his writings as he himself had announced it in his spiritual Testament.” “... my writings will continue my testimony. I will continue to give Joy to everyone and to speak of the Great Love of God and the Wonders he has done in my life.” This is still coming true because “a city set on a hill cannot be hidden, nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Matthew 5:14-16). Metaphorically, it is intended to emphasise that “light” (understood in a broad sense) must be visible, sooner or later; what is important will come to light and will be recognised.

To revisit these days – marked by the death of Monsignor Malandrino, by his funerals in Acireale (5 August, Our Lady of the Snow) and in Noto (7 August) with subsequent burial in the cathedral which he himself strongly wanted to be renovated after the collapse of 13 March 1996 and which was reopened in March 2007 (the month in which Nino Baglieri died) – means retracing this bond between two great figures of the Netine Church, strongly intertwined and both capable of leaving an indelible mark on it.

*Roberto Chiaramonte*

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## **Saint Monica, mother of Saint Augustine, witness of hope**

*A woman of unshakeable faith, of fruitful tears, answered by God after seventeen long years. A model of a Christian wife and mother for the whole Church. A witness of hope who transformed herself into a powerful intercessor in Heaven. Don*

*Bosco himself recommended to mothers afflicted by the unchristian lives of their children, to entrust themselves to her in prayer.*

In the great gallery of saints who have marked the history of the Church, Saint Monica (331-387) occupies a unique place. Not for spectacular miracles, not for the founding of religious communities, not for significant social or political undertakings. Monica is remembered and venerated primarily as a mother, the mother of Augustine, the restless young man who, thanks to her prayers, her tears, and her testimony of faith, became one of the greatest Fathers of the Church and Doctors of the Catholic faith.

But to limit her figure to the maternal role would be unfair and reductive. Monica is a woman who knew how to live her ordinary life – wife, mother, believer – in an extraordinary way, transfiguring daily life through the power of faith. She is an example of perseverance in prayer, of patience in marriage, of unshakeable hope in the face of her son's deviations.

News of her life comes to us almost exclusively from Augustine's Confessions, a text that is not a chronicle, but a theological and spiritual reading of existence. Yet, in those pages, Augustine draws an unforgettable portrait of his mother; not only a good and pious woman, but an authentic model of Christian faith, a "mother of tears" that become a source of grace.

### **Her origins in Tagaste**

Monica was born in 331 in Tagaste, a city in Numidia, [Souk Ahras](#) in present-day Algeria. It was a lively centre, marked by the Roman presence and an already rooted Christian community. She came from a well-to-do Christian family; faith was already part of her cultural and spiritual horizon.

Her upbringing was marked by the influence of an austere nurse, who educated her in sobriety and temperance. Saint Augustine would write of her, *"I will not therefore speak of*

*her gifts, but of Your gifts to her, who had not made herself alone, nor educated herself alone. You created her without even her father and mother knowing what daughter they would have; and the rod of your Christ, that is, the discipline of your Only Begotten, in a house of believers, a healthy member of your Church, instructed her in your fear.”* (Confessions IX, 8, 17).

In the same *Confessions*, Augustine also recounts a significant episode. Young Monica had developed the habit of drinking small sips of wine from the cellar, until a servant reprimanded her, calling her “drunkard”. That reprimand was enough for her to correct herself definitively. This apparently minor anecdote shows her honesty in recognising her sins, allowing herself to be corrected, and growing in virtue.

At the age of 23, Monica was given in marriage to Patricius, a pagan municipal official, known for his choleric character and marital infidelity. Married life was not easy. Living with an impulsive man distant from the Christian faith severely tested her patience.

Yet, Monica never fell into discouragement. With an attitude of meekness and respect, she gradually won her husband’s heart. She did not respond harshly to outbursts of anger, nor did she fuel unnecessary conflicts. In time, her constancy bore fruit. Patricius converted and received baptism shortly before he died.

Monica’s testimony shows how holiness is not necessarily expressed in sensational gestures, but in daily fidelity, in the love that slowly transforms difficult situations. In this sense, she is a model for many wives and mothers who live marriages marked by tensions or differences in faith.

### **Monica as a mother**

From the marriage, three children were born: Augustine, Navigius, and a daughter whose name we do not know. Monica poured all her love upon them, but above all her faith. Navigius and her daughter followed a straightforward Christian

path; Navigius became a priest; her daughter embarked on the path of consecrated virginity. Augustine, however, soon became the centre of her worries and tears.

Even as a boy, Augustine showed extraordinary intelligence. Monica sent him to study rhetoric in [Carthage](#), eager to ensure him a brilliant future. But along with intellectual progress came temptations: sensuality, worldliness, bad company. Augustine embraced the Manichaean doctrine, convinced he would find rational answers to the problem of evil. Furthermore, he began to live with a woman without marrying her, with whom he had a son, Adeodatus. Her son's deviations led Monica to deny him hospitality in her home. But she did not stop praying for him and offering sacrifices, *"from the bleeding heart of my mother, the sacrifice of her tears was offered to You for me night and day"* (Confessions V, 7,13) and *"she shed more tears than mothers ever shed at the physical death of their children"* (Confessions III, 11,19).

For Monica, it was a deep wound. Her son, whom she had consecrated to Christ in the womb, was going astray. The pain was unspeakable, but she never stopped hoping. Augustine himself would write, *"My mother's heart, struck by such a wound, would never heal, for I cannot adequately express her feelings towards me and how much greater her travail in giving birth to me in spirit was that with which she had given birth to me in the flesh."* (Confessions V, 9,16).

The question naturally arises, why did Monica not have Augustine baptised immediately after birth?

In reality, although infant baptism was already known and practised, it was not yet a universal practice. Many parents preferred to postpone it until adulthood, considering it a "definitive washing". They feared that if the baptised person sinned gravely, salvation would be compromised. Furthermore, Patricius still a pagan, had no interest in educating his son in the Christian faith.

Today we clearly see that it was an unfortunate choice, since

baptism not only makes us children of God, but also gives us the grace to overcome temptations and sin.

One thing, however, is certain, if he had been baptised as a child, Monica would have spared herself and her son much suffering.

The strongest image of Monica is that of a mother who prays and weeps. The *Confessions* describe her as a tireless woman in interceding with God for her son.

One day, a bishop of Tagaste – according to some, Ambrose himself – reassured her with words that have remained famous, “*Go, the son of so many tears cannot be lost.*” That phrase became Monica’s guiding star, the confirmation that her maternal sorrow was not in vain, but part of a mysterious design of grace.

### **A mother’s tenacity**

Monica’s life was also a pilgrimage in Augustine’s footsteps. When her son decided to secretly leave for Rome, Monica spared no effort. She did not give up the cause as lost, but followed him and sought him until she found him. She reached him in Milan, where Augustine had obtained a chair of rhetoric. Here she found a spiritual guide in Saint Ambrose, Bishop of the city. A deep harmony developed between Monica and Ambrose. She recognised in him the pastor capable of guiding her son, while Ambrose admired her unshakeable faith.

In Milan, Ambrose’s preaching opened new perspectives for Augustine. He gradually abandoned Manichaeism and began to look at Christianity with new eyes. Monica silently accompanied this process. She did not force the timing; she did not demand immediate conversions, but she prayed and supported him and remained by his side until his conversion.

### **Augustine’s conversion**

God seemed not to hear her, but Monica never stopped praying and offering sacrifices for her son. After seventeen years, her pleas were finally answered – and how! Augustine not only



became a Christian, but became a priest, bishop, doctor, and father of the Church.

He himself acknowledges it: *"But you, in the depth of Your designs, answered the vital point of her desire, without caring about the momentary object of her request, but taking care to make of me what she always asked You to do."* (Confessions V, 8,15).

The decisive moment came in 386. Augustine, inwardly tormented, struggled against the passions and resistances of his will. In the famous episode in the garden of Milan, hearing the voice of a child saying *"Tolle, lege"* ("Take up and read"), he opened the Letter to the Romans and read the words that changed his life. "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh" (Romans 13:14).

It was the beginning of his conversion. Together with his son Adeodatus and some friends, he retired to Cassiciaco to prepare for baptism. Monica was with them, sharing the joy of finally seeing the prayers of so many years answered.

On Easter night in 387, in Milan Cathedral, Ambrose baptised Augustine, Adeodatus, and the other catechumens. Monica's tears of sorrow turned into tears of joy. She continued to serve him, so much so that in Cassiciaco Augustine would say, *"She cared as if she had been mother to all and served us as if she had been daughter to all."*

### **Ostia: ecstasy and death**

After the baptism, Monica and Augustine prepared to return to Africa. Stopping in [Ostia](#), while waiting for the ship, they experienced a moment of intense spirituality. The *Confessions* narrate the ecstasy of Ostia: mother and son, looking out of a window, contemplated together the beauty of creation and ascended towards God, anticipating the beatitude of heaven.

Monica would say: *"Son, as for me, I no longer find any attraction for this life. I do not know what I am still doing*

*here and why I am here. This world is no longer an object of desire for me. There was only one reason why I wished to remain a little longer in this life, to see you a Catholic Christian before I died. God has answered me beyond all my expectations. He has granted me to see you in His service and freed from earthly aspirations for happiness. What am I doing here?"* (Confessions IX, 10,11). She had reached her earthly goal.

A few days later, Monica fell seriously ill. Feeling the end near, she said to her children: *"My children, bury your mother here; do not worry about where. Only this I ask of you, remember me at the Lord's altar, wherever you may be."* It was the synthesis of her life: the place of burial did not matter to her, but the bond in prayer and the Eucharist.

She died at 56, on 12 November 387, and was buried in Ostia.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century, her relics were transferred to a hidden crypt in the same [church of Saint Aurea](#). In 1425, the relics were translated to Rome, to the [Basilica of Saint Agostino in Campo Marzio](#), where they are still venerated today.

### **Monica's spiritual profile**

Augustine describes his mother with well-measured words:

*"[...] womanly in appearance, manly in faith, aged in serenity, maternal in love, Christian in piety [...]"*. (Confessions IX, 4, 8).

And again:

*"[...] a chaste and sober widow, assiduous in almsgiving, devout and submissive to Your saints; who did not let a day pass without bringing an offering to Your altar; who twice a day, morning and evening, without fail visited Your church, and not to confabulate vainly and gossip like other old women, but to hear Your words and to make You hear her prayers? Could You have disdained the tears of such a woman, who with them asked You not for gold or silver, nor for fleeting or fickle goods, but for the salvation of her son's soul, You who had made her so by Your grace, refusing her Your help? Certainly not, Lord. Indeed, You were beside her and heard her, working according*

*to the order by which You had predestined to work.” (Confessions V, 9,17).*

From this Augustinian testimony, a surprisingly contemporary figure emerges.

She was a woman of prayer; she never ceased to invoke God for the salvation of her loved ones. Her tears become a model of persevering intercession.

She was a faithful wife; in a difficult marriage, she never responded with resentment to her husband's harshness. Her patience and meekness were instruments of evangelisation.

She was a courageous mother. She did not abandon her son in his deviations, but accompanied him with tenacious love, capable of trusting in God's timing.

She was a witness of hope; her life shows that no situation is desperate, if lived in faith.

Monica's message does not belong only to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. It still speaks today, in a context where many families experience tensions, children stray from faith, parents experience the fatigue of waiting.

To parents, she teaches not to give up, to believe that grace works in mysterious ways.

To Christian women, she shows how meekness and fidelity can transform difficult relationships.

To anyone who feels discouraged in prayer, she testifies that God listens, even if the timing does not coincide with ours.

It is no coincidence that many associations and movements have chosen Monica as the patroness of Christian mothers and women who pray for children far from faith.

### **A simple and extraordinary woman**

The life of Saint Monica is the story of a woman both simple and extraordinary. Simple because lived in the daily life of a family; extraordinary because transfigured by faith. Her tears and prayers shaped a saint and, through him, profoundly influenced the history of the Church.

Her memory, celebrated on 27 August, on the eve of the feast

of Saint Augustine, reminds us that holiness often passes through hidden perseverance, silent sacrifice, and hope that does not disappoint.

In Augustine's words, addressed to God for his mother, we find the synthesis of her spiritual legacy: *"I cannot say enough how much my soul owes to her, my God; but you know everything. Repay her with your mercy what she asked of You with so many tears for me"* (Conf., IX, 13).

Saint Monica, through the events of her life, achieved the eternal happiness that she herself defined: *"Happiness undoubtedly consists in reaching the goal and one must have confidence that we can be led to it by a firm faith, a living hope, an ardent charity."* (On Happiness 4,35).

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## **To the heights! Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati**

"Dearest young people, our hope is Jesus. It is He, as Saint John Paul II said, 'who awakens in you the desire to make something great of your life [...], to improve yourselves and society, making it more human and fraternal' (XV World Youth Day, Prayer Vigil, 19 August 2000). Let us remain united to Him; let us remain in His friendship, always, cultivating it with prayer, adoration, Eucharistic Communion, frequent Confession, generous charity, as the blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis, who will soon be proclaimed Saints, taught us. Aspire to great things, to holiness, wherever you are. Do not settle for less. Then you will see the light of the Gospel grow every day, in you and around you" (Pope Leo XIV – homily for the Youth Jubilee– 3 August 2025).

## Pier Giorgio and Fr. Cojazzi

Senator Alfredo Frassati, ambassador of the Kingdom of Italy to Berlin, was the owner and director of the Turin newspaper *La Stampa*. The Salesians owed him a great debt of gratitude. On the occasion of the great scandalous affair known as “The Varazze incidents”, in which an attempt was made to tarnish the honour of the Salesians, Frassati had defended them. While even some Catholic newspapers seemed lost and disoriented in the face of the heavy and painful accusations, *La Stampa*, having conducted a rapid inquiry, had anticipated the conclusions of the judiciary by proclaiming the innocence of the Salesians. Thus, when a request arrived from the Frassati home for a Salesian to oversee the studies of the senator’s two children, Pier Giorgio and Luciana, Fr. Paul Albera, Rector Major, felt obliged to accept. He sent Fr. Antonio Cojazzi (1880-1953). He was the right man: well-educated, with a youthful temperament and exceptional communication skills. Fr. Cojazzi had graduated in literature in 1905, in philosophy in 1906, and had obtained a diploma enabling him to teach English after serious specialisation in England.

In the Frassati home, Fr. Cojazzi became more than just the ‘tutor’ who followed the children. He became a friend, especially to Pier Giorgio, of whom he would say, “I knew him at ten years old and followed him through almost all of grammar school and high school with lessons that were daily in the early years. I followed him with increasing interest and affection.” Pier Giorgio, who became one of the leading young people in Turin’s Catholic Action, listened to the conferences and lessons that Fr. Cojazzi held for the members of the C. Balbo Circle, followed the *Rivista dei Giovani* with interest, and sometimes went up to Valsalice in search of light and advice in decisive moments.

## A moment of notoriety

Pier Giorgio had it during the National Congress of Italian Catholic Youth in 1921: fifty thousand young people parading through Rome, singing and praying. Pier Giorgio, a polytechnic

student, carried the tricolour flag of the Turin C. Balbo circle. The royal troops suddenly surrounded the enormous procession and assaulted it to snatch the flags. They wanted to prevent disorder. A witness recounted, "They beat with rifle butts, grab, break, tear our flags. I see Pier Giorgio struggling with two guards. We rush to his aid, and the flag, with its broken pole, remains in his hands. Forcibly imprisoned in a courtyard, the young Catholics are interrogated by the police. The witness recalls the dialogue conducted with the manners and courtesies used in such contingencies:

- And you, what's your name?
- Pier Giorgio Frassati, son of Alfredo.
- What does your father do?
- Italian Ambassador in Berlin.

Astonishment, change of tone, apologies, offer of immediate freedom.

- I will leave when the others leave.

Meanwhile, the brutal spectacle continues. A priest is thrown, literally thrown into the courtyard with his cassock torn and a bleeding cheek... Together we knelt on the ground, in the courtyard, when that ragged priest raised his rosary and said, 'Boys, for us and for those who have beaten us, let us pray!'"

He loved the poor

Pier Giorgio loved the poor. He sought them out in the most distant quarters of the city. He climbed narrow, dark stairs; he entered attics where only misery and sorrow resided. Everything he had in his pockets was for others, just as everything he held in his heart. He even spent nights at the bedside of unknown sick people. One night when he didn't come home, his increasingly anxious father called the police station, the hospitals. At two o'clock, he heard the key turn in the door and Pier Giorgio entered. Dad exploded:

- Listen, you can be out during the day, at night, no one says anything to you. But when you're so late, warn us, call!

Pier Giorgio looked at him, and with his usual simplicity

replied:

– Dad, where I was, there was no phone.

The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul saw him as a diligent co-worker; the poor knew him as a comforter and helper. The miserable attics often welcomed him within their squalid walls like a ray of sunshine for their destitute inhabitants. Dominated by profound humility, he did not want what he did to be known by anyone.

Beautiful and holy Giorgetto

In the first days of July 1925, Pier Giorgio was struck down by a violent attack of poliomyelitis. He was 24 years old. On his deathbed, while a terrible illness ravaged his back, he still thought of his poor. On a note, with handwriting now almost indecipherable, he wrote for engineer Grimaldi, his friend. Here are Converso's injections, the policy is Sappa's. I forgot it; you renew it.

Returning from Pier Giorgio's funeral, Fr. Cojazzi immediately wrote an article for the Rivista dei Giovani. "I will repeat the old phrase, but most sincerely: I didn't think I loved him so much. Beautiful and holy Giorgetto! Why do these words sing insistently in my heart? Because I heard them repeated; I heard them uttered for almost two days by his father, by his mother, by his sister, with a voice that always said and never repeated. And why do certain verses from a Deroulède ballad surface, "He will be spoken of for a long time, in golden palaces and in remote cottages! Because the hovels and attics, where he passed so many times as a comforting angel, will also speak of him." I knew him at ten years old and followed him through almost all of grammar school and part of high school... I followed him with increasing interest and affection until his present transfiguration... I will write his life. It is about collecting testimonies that present the figure of this young man in the fullness of his light, in spiritual and moral truth, in the luminous and contagious testimony of goodness and generosity."

The best-seller of Catholic publishing

Encouraged and urged also by the Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Giuseppe Gamba, Fr. Cojazzi set to work with good cheer. Numerous and qualified testimonies arrived, were ordered and carefully vetted. Pier Giorgio's mother followed the work, gave suggestions, provided material. In March 1928, Pier Giorgio's life was published. Luigi Gedda writes, "It was a resounding success. In just nine months, 30,000 copies of the book were sold out. By 1932, 70,000 copies had already been distributed. Within 15 years, the book on Pier Giorgio reached 11 editions, and was perhaps the best-seller of Catholic publishing in that period." The figure illuminated by Fr. Cojazzi was a banner for Catholic Action during the difficult time of fascism. In 1942, 771 youth associations of Catholic Action, 178 aspiring sections, 21 university associations, 60 groups of secondary school students, 29 conferences of St. Vincent, 23 Gospel groups... had taken the name of Pier Giorgio Frassati. The book was translated into at least 19 languages. Fr. Cojazzi's book marked a turning point in the history of Italian youth. Pier Giorgio was the ideal pointed out without any reservation; one who was able to demonstrate that being a Christian to the core is not at all utopian or fantastic.

Pier Giorgio Frassati also marked a turning point in Fr. Cojazzi's history. That note written by Pier Giorgio on his deathbed revealed the world of the poor to him in a concrete, almost brutal way. Fr. Cojazzi himself writes, "On Good Friday of this year (1928) with two university students I visited the poor outside Porta Metronia for four hours. That visit gave me a very salutary lesson and humiliation. I had written and spoken a lot about the Conferences of St. Vincent... and yet I had never once gone to visit the poor. In those squalid shacks, tears often came to my eyes... The conclusion? Here it is clear and raw for me and for you; fewer beautiful words and more good deeds."

Living contact with the poor is not only an immediate implementation of the Gospel, but a school of life for young



people. They are the best school for young people, to educate them and keep them serious about life. How can one who visits the poor and touches their material and moral wounds with their own hands waste their money, their time, their youth? How can they complain about their own labours and sorrows, when they have known, through direct experience, that others suffer more than them?

Not just existing, but living!

Pier Giorgio Frassati is a luminous example of youthful, contemporary holiness, 'framed' in our time. He testifies once again that faith in Jesus Christ is the religion of the strong and of the truly young, which alone can illuminate all truths with the light of the 'mystery' and which alone can give perfect joy. His existence is the perfect model of normal life within everyone's reach. He, like all followers of Jesus and the Gospel, began with small things. He reached the most sublime heights by forcing himself to avoid the compromises of a mediocre and meaningless life and by using his natural stubbornness in his firm intentions. Everything in his life was a step for him to climb; even what should have been a stumbling block. Among his companions, he was the intrepid and exuberant animator of every undertaking, attracting so much sympathy and admiration around him. Nature had been generous to him: from a renowned family, rich, with a solid and practical intellect, a strong and robust physique, a complete education, he lacked nothing to make his way in life. But he did not intend to just exist, but to conquer his place in the sun, struggling. He was a man of strong character and a Christian soul.

His life had an inherent coherence that rested on the unity of spirit and existence, of faith and works. The source of this luminous personality lay in his profound inner life. Frassati prayed. His thirst for Grace made him love everything that fills and enriches the spirit. He approached Holy Communion every day, then remained at the foot of the altar for a long time, nothing being able to distract him. He prayed in the

mountains and on the road. However, his was not an ostentatious faith, even if the signs of the cross made on public streets when passing churches were large and confident; even if the Rosary was said aloud, in a train carriage or in a hotel room. But it was rather a faith lived so intensely and genuinely that it burst forth from his generous and frank soul with a simplicity of attitude that convinced and moved. His spiritual formation was strengthened in nocturnal adorations, of which he was a fervent proponent and unfailing participant. He performed spiritual exercises more than once, drawing serenity and spiritual vigour from them.

Fr. Cojazzi's book closes with the phrase: "To have known him or to have heard of him means to love him, and to love him means to follow him." The wish is that the testimony of Pier Giorgio Frassati may be "salt and light" for everyone, especially for young people today.

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## **Don Bosco and the Church of the Holy Shroud**

*The Holy Shroud of Turin, one of Christianity's most revered relics, has a thousand-year history intertwined with that of the House of Savoy and the Savoyard city. Arriving in Turin in 1578, it became an object of profound devotion, with solemn exhibitions linked to historical and dynastic events. In the 19th century, figures such as Saint John Bosco and other Turin saints promoted its veneration, contributing to its widespread appeal. Today, preserved in Guarini's Chapel, the Shroud is at the centre of scientific and theological studies. In parallel, the Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome, linked to the House of Savoy and the Piedmontese community, represents another significant place, where Don Bosco attempted to establish a*

*Salesian presence.*

The Holy Shroud of Turin, improperly called the “Santo Sudario” in Italian due to the French custom of calling it “Le Saint Suaire” was owned by the House of Savoy since 1463, and was transferred from Chambery to the new Savoy capital in 1578.

In that same year, the first exposition was held, commissioned by Emanuele Filiberto in homage to Card. Charles Borromeo who came to Turin on pilgrimage to venerate it.

### **Expositions in the 19th century and veneration of the Shroud**

In the 19th century, the Expositions in 1815, 1842, 1868 and 1898 are particularly worthy of note: the first for the return of the Savoy family to their states, the second for the wedding of Victor Emmanuel II to Maria Adelaide of Habsburg-Lorraine, the third for the wedding of Umberto I to Margaret of Savoy-Genoa, and the fourth for the Universal Exhibition.

The nineteenth-century Turin saints, Cottolengo, Cafasso and Don Bosco, were devotees of the Holy Shroud, emulating the example of Blessed Sebastiano Valfré, the apostle of Turin during the siege of 1706.

The *Biographical Memoirs* assure us that Don Bosco venerated it in particular at the Exposition in 1842 and 1868, when he also brought the boys from the oratory to see it (BM II, 91; IX, 70-71).

Today, the priceless canvas, donated by Umberto II of Savoy to the Holy See, is entrusted to the Archbishop of Turin’s “Pontifical Custodian” and kept in the sumptuous Guarini Chapel behind the Cathedral.

In Turin there is also, in Via Piave at the corner of Via San Domenico, the Church of the Holy Shroud, built by the Confraternity of the same name and rebuilt in 1761. Adjacent to the church is the “Sindonological Museum” and the headquarters of the “Cultores Sanctae Sindonis” Sodality, a centre for sindonological studies to which Salesian scholars

such as Fr Natale Noguier de Malijay, Fr Antonio Tonelli, Fr Alberto Caviglia, Fr Pietro Scotti and, more recently, Fr Pietro Rinaldi and Fr Luigi Fossati, to name but the main ones, have made valuable contributions.

### **The Church of the Holy Shroud in Rome**

A [Church of the Holy Shroud](#) also exists in Rome along the street of the same name that runs from Largo Argentina parallel to Corso Vittorio. Constructed in 1604 to a design by Carlo di Castellamonte, it was the Church of the Piedmontese, Savoyards and Niçois, built by the Confraternity of the Holy Shroud that had sprung up in Rome at that time. After 1870 it became the special church of the House of Savoy.

During his stays in Rome, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in that church several times and formulated a plan for it and the adjacent house in line with the purpose of the then extinct Confraternity, dedicated to charitable works for abandoned youth, the sick and prisoners.

The Confraternity had ceased operating at the beginning of the century and the ownership and administration of the church had passed to the Sardinian Legation to the Holy See. By the 1960s, the church was in need of major renovations, so much so that in 1868 it was temporarily closed.

But already in 1867 Don Bosco had come up with the idea of proposing to the Savoy Government to hand over the use and administration of the church to him, offering his collaboration in money to complete the restoration work. Perhaps he foresaw the entry of the Piedmontese troops into Rome not far away and, wishing to open a house there, he thought of doing so before the situation precipitated making it more difficult to obtain the Holy See's approval and the State's respect for agreements (BM IX, 192, 223, 301).

He then presented the request to the government. In 1869, during a stopover in Florence, he prepared a draft agreement which, on reaching Rome, he presented to Pius IX. Having obtained his assent, he moved on to the official

request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but, unfortunately, the occupation of Rome then came to jeopardise the whole affair. Don Bosco himself saw the inappropriateness of insisting. Taking on a Roman church belonging to the Savoy by a religious Congregation with its Mother House in Turin at that time, could have appeared an act of opportunism and servility towards the new Government.

After the breach of Porta Pia, with a minute dated 2 December 1871, the Church of the Most Holy Shroud was annexed to the Royal House and designated as the official seat of the Palatine Chief Chaplain. Following Pius IX's interdict on the Chapels of the former Apostolic Palace of the Quirinal, it was in the Church of the Shroud that all the sacred rites of the Royal Family took place.

In 1874 Don Bosco again tested the ground with the Government. But, unfortunately, intemperate news leaked from the newspapers definitively put a stop to the project (BM X, 532-533).

With the end of the monarchy on 2 June 1946, the entire Shroud complex passed under the management of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic. In 1984, following the new Concordat which sanctioned the abolition of the Palatine Chapels, the Church of the Shroud was entrusted to the Military Ordinariate and has remained so to this day.

However, we would like to recall the fact that Don Bosco, in seeking a favourable opportunity to open a house in Rome, set his eyes on the Church of the Holy Shroud.

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## **The title of Basilica for the**

# Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome

On the centenary of the death of Fr Paul Albera it was highlighted how the second successor of Don Bosco realised what could be described as a dream of Don Bosco. In fact, thirty-four years after the consecration of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, which took place in the presence of the by now exhausted Don Bosco (May 1887), Pope Benedict XV – the pope of the famous and unheard of definition of the First World War as ‘useless slaughter’ – conferred on the church the title of Minor Basilica (11 February 1921). Don Bosco had “given his soul” (and his body too!) for its construction in the last seven years of his life. He had done the same in the previous twenty years (1865-1868) with the construction of the church of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, Turin, the first Salesian church elevated to the dignity of a minor basilica on 28 June 1911, in the presence of the new Rector Major Fr Paul Albera.

## **Discovery of the request**

But how did this result come about? Who was behind it? We now know for sure thanks to the recent discovery of the typewritten draft of the request for this title by Rector Major Fr Paul Albera. It is included in a booklet commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Sacred Heart published in 1905 by the then Rector Fr Francesco Tomasetti (1868-1953). The typescript, dated 17 January 1921, has minimal corrections by the Rector Major but, what is important, bears his handwritten signature.

After describing Don Bosco’s work and the unceasing activity of the parish, probably taken from the old file, Fr Albera addresses the Pope in these terms

“While the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus is growing and spreading all over the world, and new Churches are being

dedicated to the Divine Heart, also through the noble initiative of the Salesians, as in S. Paolo in Brazil, in La Plata in Argentina, in London, in Barcelona and elsewhere, it seems that the primary Church-Sanctuary dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome, where such an important devotion has an affirmation so worthy of the Eternal City, deserves special distinction. The undersigned, therefore, having heard the opinion of the Superior Council of the Pious Salesian Society, humbly begs Your Holiness to deign to grant the Church-Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the Castro Pretorio in Rome the Title and Privileges of a Minor Basilica, hoping that this honourable elevation will increase devotion, piety and every catholic beneficial activity”.

The request, in its final draft, signed by Fr Albera, was most likely sent by the procurator Fr Francesco Tomasetti to the Sacred Congregation of the Brevi, which welcomed it. He quickly drew up the draft of the Apostolic Brief to be kept in the Vatican Archives, had it transcribed by expert calligraphers on rich parchment and passed it on to the Secretariat of State for the signature of the the one in charge at the time, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

Today, the faithful can admire this original of the granting of the requested title nicely framed in the sacristy of the Basilica (see photo).

We can only be grateful to Dr Patrizia Buccino, a scholar of archaeology and history, and Salesian historian Fr Giorgio Rossi, who spread the news. It is up to them to complete the investigation begun by searching the Vatican Archives for the entire correspondence which will also be made known to the scientific world through the well-known Salesian history magazine “Ricerche Storiche Salesiane”.

### **Sacred Heart: a national basilica with an international reach**

Twenty-six years earlier, on 16 July 1885, at the request of Don Bosco and with the explicit consent of Pope Leo XIII, Archbishop Gaetano Alimonda, Archbishop of Turin, had warmly

urged the Italians to participate in the success of the “noble and holy proposal [of the new church] calling it a national vow of the Italians”.

Fr Albera in his request to the pontiff, after recalling Cardinal Alimonda’s pressing appeal, recalled that all the nations of the world had been asked to contribute economically to the construction, decoration of the church and annexed works (including the inevitable Salesian oratory with a hospice!) so that the Church-Sanctuary, as well as a national vow, had become a “worldwide or international manifestation of devotion to the Sacred Heart”.

In this regard, in a historical and ascetical paper published on the occasion of the 1st Centenary of the Consecration of the Basilica (1987), the scholar Armando Pedrini described it as: “A church that is therefore international because of the catholicity and universality of its message to all peoples”, also in consideration of the Basilica’s “prominent position” adjacent to the acknowledged internationality of the railway station.

Rome-Termini is therefore not only a large railway station with problems of public order and a difficult scene to manage, often mentioned in the newspapers and like many railway stations in many European capitals. But it is also home to the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. And while in the evening and at night time the area does not convey security to tourists, during the day the Basilica offers peace and serenity to the faithful who enter it, stop there in prayer, receive the sacraments.

Will the pilgrims who will pass through the Termini railway station in the not too distant holy year (2025) remember this? All they have to do is cross the street... and the Sacred Heart of Jesus awaits them.

PS. In Rome there is a second Salesian parish basilica, larger and artistically richer than the Sacred Heart one: it is the Basilica of St John Bosco at Tuscolano, which became such in 1965, a few years after its inauguration (1959). Where is it



located? Obviously in the Don Bosco district (a stone's throw from the famous Cinecittà studios). While the statue on the bell tower of the basilica of the Sacred Heart dominates the square of Termini station, the dome of the basilica of Don Bosco, slightly lower than St. Peter's, however, overlooks it directly, albeit from two extreme points of the capital. And since there is no two without three, there is a third splendid Salesian parish basilica in Rome: that of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, in the Appio-Tuscolano district, next to the large Pio XI Institute.

**Apostolic Letter entitled *Pia Societas*, dated 11 February 2021, by which His Holiness Benedict XV elevated the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the rank of Basilica.**

Ecclesia parochialis SS.mi Cordis Iesu ad Castrum Praetorium in urbe titulo et privilegiis Basilicae Minoris decoratur.  
Benedictus pp. XV

Ad perpetuam rei memoriam.

Pia Societas sancti Francisci Salesii, a venerabili Servo Dei Ioanne Bosco iam Augustae Taurinorum condita atque hodie per dissitas quoque orbis regiones diffusa, omnibus plane cognitum est quanta sibi merita comparaverit non modo incumbendo actuose sollerterque in puerorum, orbitate laborantium, religiosam honestamque institutionem, verum etiam in rei catholicae profectum tum apud christianum populum, tum apud infideles in longinquis et asperrimis Missionibus. Eiusdem Societatis sodalibus est quoque in hac Alma Urbe Nostra ecclesia paroecialis Sacratissimo Cordi Iesu dicata, in qua, etsi non abhinc multos annos condita, eximii praesertim Praedecessoris Nostri Leonis PP. XIII iussu atque auspiciis, christifideles urbani, eorundem Sodalium opera, adeo ad Dei cultum et virtutum laudem exercentur, ut ea vel cum antiquioribus paroeciis in honoris ac meritorum contentionem veniat. Ipsemet Salesianorum Sodalium fundator, venerabilis Ioannes Bosco, in nova Urbis regione, aere saluberrimo populoque confertissima, quae ad

Gastrum Praetorium exstat, exaedificationem inchoavit istius templi, et, quasi illud erigeret ex gentis italicae voto et pietatis testimonio erga Sacratissimum Cor Iesu, stipem praecipue ex Italiae christifidelibus studiose conlegit; verumtamen pii homines ex ceteris nationibus non defuerunt, qui, in exstruendum perficiendumque templum istud, erga Ssmum Cor Iesu amore incensi, largam pecuniae vim contulerint. Anno autem MDCCCLXXXVII sacra ipsa aedes, secundum speciosam formam a Virginio Vespignani architecto delineatam, tandem perfecta ac sollemniter consecrata dedicataque est. Eamdem vero postea, magna cum sollertia, Sodales Salesianos non modo variis altaribus, imaginibus affabre depictis et statuīs, omnique sacro cultui necessaria supellectili exornasse, verum etiam continentibus aedificiis iuventuti, ut tempora nostra postulant, rite instituendae ditasse, iure ac merito Praedecessores Nostri sunt" laetati, et Nos haud minore animi voluptate probamus. Quapropter cum dilectus filius Paulus Albera, hodiernus Piae Societatis sancti Francisci Salesii rector maior, nomine proprio ac religiosorum virorum quibus praeest, quo memorati templi Ssmi Cordi Iesu dicati maxime augeatur decus, eiusdem urbanae paroeciae fidelium fides et pietas foveatur, Nos supplex rogaverit, ut eidem templo dignitatem, titulum et privilegia Basilicae Minoris pro Nostra benignitate impertiri dignemur; Nos, ut magis magisque stimulos fidelibus ipsius paroeciae atque Urbis totius Nostrae ad Sacratissimum Cor Iesu impensius colendum atque adamandum addamus, nec non benevolentiam, qua Sodales Salesianos ob merita sua prosequimur, publice significemus, votis hisce piis annuendum ultro libenterque censemus. Quam ob rem, conlatis consiliis cum VV. FF. NN. S. R. E. Cardinalibus Congregationi Ss. Rituum praepositis, Motu proprio ac de certa scientia et matura deliberatione Nostris, deque apostolicae potestatis plenitudine, praesentium Litterarum tenore perpetuumque in modum, enunciatum templum Sacratissimo Cordi Iesu dicatum, in hac alma Urbe Nostra atque ad Castrum Praetorium situm, dignitate ac titulo Basilicae Minoris honestamus, cum omnibus et singulis honoribus, praerogativis, privilegiis, indultis

quae aliis Minoribus Almae huius Urbis Basilicis de iure competunt. Decernentes praesentes Litteras firmas, validas atque efficaces semper exstare ac permanere, suosque integros effectus sortiri iugiter et obtinere, illisque ad quos pertinent nunc et in posterum plenissime suffragari; sicque rite iudicandum esse ac definiendum, irritumque ex nunc et inane fieri, si quidquam secus super his, a quovis, auctoritate qualibet, scienter sive ignoranter attentari contigerit. Non obstantibus contrariis quibuscumque.

Datum Romae apud sanctum Petrum sub annulo Piscatoris, die XI februarii MCMXXI, Pontificatus Nostri anno septimo.

P. CARD. GASPARRI, a Secretis Status.

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The parish church of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at Castrum Praetorium in the city is honoured with the title and privileges of a Minor Basilica.

Pope Benedict XV

For perpetual remembrance.

The Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, founded in Augusta Taurinorum by the Venerable Servant of God John Bosco and now spread throughout diverse regions of the world, is well known to all for the great merits it has acquired—not only by diligently and zealously devoting itself to the religious and moral education of orphaned and labouring children, but also by advancing the Catholic cause both among Christian populations and in distant and arduous missions among unbelievers. In this Our Beloved City, the members of the same Society also serve the parish church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, where, though established not many years ago by the command and under the auspices of Our illustrious predecessor Pope Leo XIII, the urban faithful, through the work of these same members, are so fervently trained in divine worship and the praise of virtue that it may

even rival older parishes in honour and merit.

The founder of the Salesian Society himself, the Venerable John Bosco, began the construction of this church in a new district of the City, renowned for its wholesome air and dense population, near Castrum Praetorium. As if raising it in fulfilment of the Italian people's vow and as a testimony of devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, he diligently collected funds chiefly from the faithful of Italy; yet pious individuals from other nations were not lacking, who, inflamed with love for the Most Sacred Heart, contributed generously to the building and completion of this church. In the year 1887, the sacred edifice, designed according to the splendid plan of the architect Virginio Vespignani, was finally completed and solemnly consecrated and dedicated.

Afterwards, with great diligence, the Salesians adorned it not only with various altars, skilfully painted images and statues, and all the furnishings necessary for sacred worship, but also enriched it with adjoining buildings for the proper education of youth, as our times demand. Our predecessors rightly and justly rejoiced at this, and We too approve with no less satisfaction.

Wherefore, since Our beloved son Paul Albera, the present Superior General of the Pious Society of St Francis de Sales, in his own name and that of the religious under his care, has humbly besought Us that the honour of the aforesaid church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus may be greatly enhanced, and the faith and piety of the faithful of the urban parish may be fostered, and that We may deign in Our kindness to bestow upon the same church the dignity, title, and privileges of a Minor Basilica; We, desiring to further stimulate the faithful of this parish and of Our whole City to more fervent worship and love of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and to publicly signify the benevolence with which We regard the Salesians for their merits, have willingly and gladly resolved to grant these pious requests.

For this reason, having consulted with Our Venerable Brothers the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church assigned to the Congregation of Sacred Rites, by Our own initiative, with certain knowledge and mature deliberation, and by the fullness of apostolic authority, We, by the tenor of these present Letters and in perpetuity, honour the aforesaid church dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, located in this Our Beloved City near Castrum Praetorium, with the dignity and title of a Minor Basilica, together with all and singular the honours, prerogatives, privileges, and indults which by right belong to other Minor Basilicas of this Beloved City.

We decree that these present Letters shall always be firm, valid, and effective, and shall perpetually obtain their full and complete effects, and shall fully avail those to whom they pertain now and hereafter; and thus it is to be judged and defined in due form, and anything to the contrary, attempted by any authority, knowingly or unknowingly, is hereby declared null and void.

Notwithstanding any contrary provisions.

Given at Rome, at St Peter's, under the Fisherman's Ring, on the 11th day of February 1921, in the seventh year of Our Pontificate.

P. Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State.

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# **The Prophecies of Malachy. The Popes and the End of the**

# World

*The so-called “Prophecies of Malachy” represent one of the most fascinating and controversial prophetic texts concerning the destiny of the Catholic Church and the world. Attributed to Malachy of Armagh, an Irish archbishop who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, these predictions briefly describe, through enigmatic Latin mottos, the pontiffs from Celestine II up to the final pope, the mysterious “Peter the Second”. Although modern scholars consider them forgeries dating back to the late sixteenth century, the prophecies continue to spark debates, apocalyptic interpretations, and speculation about possible eschatological scenarios. Regardless of their authenticity, they nevertheless represent a strong call to spiritual vigilance and conscious waiting for the final judgment.*

## **Malachy of Armagh. Biography of a “Boniface of Ireland”**

Malachy (in Irish *Máel Máedóc Ua Morgair*, in Latin *Malachias*) was born around 1094 near Armagh, into a noble family. He received his intellectual formation from the learned Imhar O’Hagan and, despite his initial reluctance, was ordained a priest in 1119 by Archbishop Cellach. After a period of liturgical refinement at the monastery of Lismore, Malachy undertook intense pastoral activity that led him to hold positions of increasing responsibility. In 1123, as Abbot of Bangor, he initiated the restoration of sacramental discipline; in 1124, appointed Bishop of Down and Connor, he continued liturgical and pastoral reform; and in 1132, having become Archbishop of Armagh after difficult disputes with local usurpers, he liberated the primatial see of Ireland and promoted the diocesan structure sanctioned by the Synod of Ráth Breasail.

During his ministry, Malachy introduced significant reforms by adopting the Roman liturgy, replacing clan-based monastic

inheritances with the diocesan structure prescribed by the Synod of Ráth Breasail (1111), and promoted individual confession, sacramental marriage, and confirmation.

For these reform efforts, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux compared him to Saint Boniface, the apostle of Germany.

Malachy made two journeys to Rome (1139 and 1148) to receive the metropolitan pallium for the new ecclesiastical provinces of Ireland, and on that occasion was appointed papal legate. Upon returning from his first journey, with the help of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, he founded the Cistercian abbey of Mellifont (1142), the first of numerous Cistercian foundations on Irish soil. He died during a second journey towards Rome, on November 2, 1148, in Clairvaux, in the arms of Saint Bernard, who wrote his biography titled "*Vita Sancti Malachiae*" (Life of Saint Malachy).

In 1190, Pope Clement III officially canonized him, making him the first Irish saint proclaimed according to the formal procedure of the Roman Curia.

### **The "Prophecy of the Popes": a text that appears four centuries later**

Only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was a collection of 112 mottos associated with this reforming archbishop, supposedly describing as many pontiffs: from Celestine II to the enigmatic "Peter the Second," destined to witness the destruction of the "city of seven hills."

The first publication of these prophecies, dating back to 1595, when the Benedictine monk Arnold Wion included them in his work *Lignum Vitae*, presenting them as a manuscript written by Malachy during his visit to Rome in 1139.

The prophecies consist of short, symbolic phrases intended to characterize each pope through references to their name, birthplace, coat of arms, or significant events of their pontificate. Below are the mottos attributed to the most recent pontiffs:

**109** – *\*De medietate Lunae\** (“From the half of the moon”)

Attributed to John Paul I, who reigned for only one month. He was elected on 26.08.1978, when the moon was in its last quarter (25.08.1978), and died on 28.09.1978, when the moon was in its first quarter (24.09.1978).

**110** – *\*De labore solis\** (“From the labour of the sun”)

Attributed to John Paul II, who led the Church for 26 years, the third-longest pontificate in history after Saint Peter (34-37 years) and Blessed Pius IX (more than 31 years). He was elected on 16.10.1978, shortly after a partial solar eclipse (02.10.1978), and died on 02.04.2005, a few days before an annular solar eclipse (08.04.2005).

**111** – *\*Gloria olivae\** (“Glory of the olive”)

Attributed to Benedict XVI (2005-2013). Cardinal Ratzinger, engaged in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, chose the name Benedict XVI in continuity with Benedict XV, a pope who worked for peace during World War I, as he himself explained in his first General Audience on April 27, 2005 (peace is symbolized by the olive branch brought by the dove to Noah at the end of the Flood). This symbolic connection was further strengthened by the canonization in 2009 of Bernardo Tolomei (1272-1348), founder of the Benedictine congregation of Santa Maria di Monte Oliveto (Olivetan Monks).

**112[a]** – *\*In persecutione extrema Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae sedebit...\**

This is not strictly a motto, but an introductory phrase. In the original 1595 edition, it appears as a separate line, suggesting the possibility of inserting additional popes between Benedict XVI and the prophesied “Peter the Second.” This would contradict the interpretation that necessarily identifies Pope Francis as the last pontiff.

**112[b]** – *\*Petrus Secundus\**

Refers to the last pope (the Church had Saint Peter as its first pontiff and will have another Peter as its last) who



will guide the faithful in times of tribulation.

The entire paragraph of the prophecy reads:

\*“In persecutione extrema Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae sedebit Petrus Secundus, qui pascet oves in multis tribulationibus; quibus transactis, Civitas septicollis diruetur, et Iudex tremendus judicabit populum suum. Amen.” \*

“During the final persecution of the Holy Roman Church, Peter the Second will sit, who will feed his sheep amidst many tribulations; when these things are finished, the city of seven hills [Rome] will be destroyed, and the terrible Judge will judge his people. Amen.”

“Peter the Second” would thus be the last pontiff before the end of times, with a clear apocalyptic reference to the destruction of Rome and the final judgment.

### **Contemporary Speculations**

In recent years, speculative interpretations have multiplied: some identify Pope Francis as the 112<sup>th</sup> and final pontiff, others suggest that he is a transitional pope leading to the true last pope, and some even predict 2027 as a possible date for the end of times.

This last hypothesis is based on a curious calculation: from the first papal election mentioned in the prophecy (Celestine II in 1143) until the first publication of the text (during the pontificate of Sixtus V, 1585-1590), about 442 years passed; following the same logic, adding another 442 years from the publication would lead to 2027. These speculations, however, lack a scientific basis, as the original manuscript contains no explicit chronological references.

### **Contested Authenticity**

Since the text's appearance, numerous historians have expressed doubts about its authenticity for several reasons:

- **absence of ancient manuscripts:** no copies datable before 1595 exist;
- **linguistic style:** the Latin used is typical of the

16<sup>th</sup> century, not the 12<sup>th</sup>;

- **retrospective accuracy:** the mottos referring to popes before the conclave of 1590 are surprisingly accurate, while those subsequent are much vaguer and easily adaptable to later events;

- **political purposes:** in an era of strong tensions between curial factions, such a prophetic list could have influenced the cardinal electors in the Conclave of 1590.

### **The Church's Position**

Catholic doctrine teaches, as reported in the [Catechism](#), that the destiny of the Church cannot be different from that of its Head, Jesus Christ. Paragraphs 675-677 describe "The Church's ultimate trial":

*Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.*

*The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism, especially the "intrinsically perverse" political form of a secular messianism.*

*The Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through this final Passover, when she will follow her Lord in his death and Resurrection. The kingdom will be fulfilled, then, not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final*

*unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven. God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world.*

At the same time, official Catholic doctrine urges prudence, based on the very words of Jesus:

*"Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray" (Mt 24:11).*

*"For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Mt 24:24).*

The Church emphasizes, following the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 24:36), that the time of the end of the world cannot be known by humans, but only by God Himself. And the official Magisterium – The Catechism (no. 673-679) reiterates that no one can "read" the hour of Christ's return.

The prophecies attributed to Saint Malachy have never received official approval from the Church. However, beyond their historical authenticity, they remind us of a fundamental truth of the Christian faith: the end of times will occur, as taught by Jesus.

For two thousand years, people have reflected on this eschatological event, often forgetting that the "end of times" for each individual coincides with the end of their own earthly existence. What does it matter if the end of our life coincides with the end of times? For many, it will not. What truly matters is authentically living the Christian life day by day, following the teachings of Christ and always being ready to account to the Creator and Redeemer for the talents received. Jesus' warning remains ever relevant: "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on which day your Lord will come" (Mt 24:42).

In this light, the mystery of "Peter the Second" represents not so much a threat of ruin, but rather an invitation to

constant conversion and trust in the divine plan of salvation.

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## Fr. Peter Ricaldone is Reborn in Mirabello Monferrato

*Fr. Peter Ricaldone (Mirabello Monferrato, 27 April 1870 – Rome, 25 November 1951) was the fourth successor of Don Bosco as leader of the Salesians, a man of vast culture, deep spirituality, and great love for young people. Born and raised amidst the Monferrato hills, he always carried the spirit of that land with him, translating it into a pastoral and educational commitment that would make him a figure of international standing. Today, the people of Mirabello Monferrato wish to bring him back to their lands.*

### **The Don Pietro Ricaldone Committee: Revival of a Legacy (2019)**

In 2019, a group of past pupils, historians, and enthusiasts of local traditions formed the **Don Pietro Ricaldone Committee** in Mirabello Monferrato. The objective – simple yet ambitious – has been from the outset, to restore Don Pietro's figure to the heart of the town and its young people, so that his story and spiritual legacy will not be lost.

To prepare for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth (1870–2020), the Committee searched the Mirabello Municipal Historical Archive and the Salesian Historical Archive, uncovering letters, notes, and old volumes. From this work, an illustrated biography was created, designed for readers of all ages, in which Ricaldone's personality emerges clearly and engagingly. Collaboration with Fr. Egidio Deiana, a scholar of Salesian history, was fundamental during this phase.

In 2020, a series of events was planned – photographic exhibits, concerts, theatre and circus performances – all centred on remembering Fr. Peter. Although the pandemic forced the rescheduling of many of the celebrations, in July of that year a commemorative event took place, featuring a photographic exhibit on the stages of Ricaldone's life, children's entertainment with creative workshops, and a solemn celebration attended by several Salesian Superiors.

That gathering marked the beginning of a new period of focus on the Mirabello area.

### **Beyond the 150<sup>th</sup>: The Concert for the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Death**

The enthusiasm for reviving the figure of Don Pietro Ricaldone led the Committee to extend its activities beyond the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Ahead of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death (25 November 1951), the Committee organised a concert titled "Hasten the radiant dawn of the longed-for day", a phrase taken from Fr. Peter's 1942 circular on Gregorian Chant.

At the height of the Second World War, Fr. Peter – then Rector Major – wrote a famous circular on Gregorian Chant in which he stressed the importance of music as a special way to lead human hearts back to charity, gentleness, and above all, to God: *'It may surprise some that, amidst such a clamour of arms, I invite you to engage with music. Yet I believe, even setting aside mythological allusions, that this theme fully meets the needs of the present hour. Everything that can exert an educative influence and lead people back to feelings of charity and gentleness, and above all to God, must be practised by us, diligently and without delay, to hasten the radiant dawn of the longed-for day.'*

### **Salesian Walks and Roots: The "Don Bosco Walk"**

Although established as a tribute to Fr. Ricaldone, the Committee has also ended up promoting the figure of Don Bosco

and the entire Salesian tradition, of which Fr. Peter was both an heir and a protagonist.

Since 2021, every second Sunday of October, the Committee has promoted the “Don Bosco Walk”, re-enacting the pilgrimage Don Bosco undertook with the boys from Mirabello to Lu Monferrato between 12<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> October 1861. During those five days, the details of the first Salesian school outside Turin were planned, entrusted to Blessed Michael Rua, with Fr. Albera among the teachers. Although the initiative does not directly involve Fr. Peter, it highlights his roots and connection to the local Salesian tradition that he himself carried forward.

### **Hospitality and Cultural Exchanges**

The Committee facilitated the welcoming of groups of young people, vocational schools, and Salesian clerics from around the world. Some families offer free hospitality, renewing the fraternity characteristic of Don Bosco and Fr. Peter. In 2023, a large group from the Crocetta visited Mirabello, while every summer, international groups arrive, accompanied by Fr. Egidio Deiana. Each visit is a dialogue between historical memory and the joy of youth.

On 30 March 2025, nearly one hundred Salesian chapter members stopped in Mirabello, visiting the places where Don Bosco opened his first school outside Turin and where Fr. Peter spent his formative years. The Committee, together with the Parish and the *Pro Loco* (local community association), organised the reception and created an informative video about local Salesian history, which was appreciated by all participants.

The initiatives continue, and today the Committee, led by its president, is collaborating on the creation of *Don Bosco's Monferrato Walk*, a spiritual route of approximately 200 km following the autumn paths walked by the Saint. The aim is to obtain official regional recognition, but also to offer pilgrims an experience of formation and evangelisation. Indeed, Don Bosco's youth walks were experiences of formation

and evangelisation: the same spirit that Fr. Peter Ricaldone would later defend and promote throughout his time as Rector Major.

### **The Committee's Mission: Keeping Fr. Peter's Memory Alive**

Behind every initiative lies the desire to highlight the educative, pastoral, and cultural work of Fr. Peter Ricaldone. The Committee's founders cherish personal childhood memories and wish to pass on to new generations the values of faith, culture, and solidarity that inspired the priest from Mirabello. In an era when many points of reference are faltering, rediscovering Fr. Peter's path means offering a life model capable of illuminating the present, 'Where Saints pass, God walks with them, and nothing is ever the same again' (Saint John Paul II).

The Fr. Peter Ricaldone Committee acts as a custodian of this legacy, trusting that the memory of a great son of Mirabello will continue to light the way for generations to come, charting a steady path built on faith, culture, and solidarity.

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## **Is Confession Still Necessary?**

*The Sacrament of Confession, often overlooked in today's hectic world, remains for the Catholic Church an irreplaceable source of grace and inner renewal. We invite you to rediscover its original meaning: not a mere formal ritual, but a personal encounter with God's mercy, established by Christ himself and entrusted to the ministry of the Church. In an age that downplays sin, Confession proves to be a compass for the*

*conscience, medicine for the soul, and a wide-open door to peace of heart.*

### **The Sacrament of Confession: A Necessity for the Soul**

In the Catholic tradition, the Sacrament of Confession—also called the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Penance—holds a central place on the journey of faith. It is not merely a formal act or a practice reserved for a few particularly devout faithful, but a profound necessity involving every Christian called to live in God's grace. In an age that tends to relativize the concept of sin, rediscovering the beauty and liberating power of Confession is fundamental to fully responding to God's love.

Jesus Christ himself instituted the Sacrament of Confession. After His Resurrection, He appeared to the Apostles and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). These words are not symbolic; they establish a real and concrete power entrusted to the Apostles and, through succession, to their successors, the bishops and priests.

The forgiveness of sins, therefore, does not happen only privately between man and God, but also passes through the ministry of the Church. God, in His plan of salvation, willed that personal confession before a priest be the ordinary means of receiving His forgiveness.

### **The Reality of Sin**

To understand the necessity of Confession, one must first become aware of the reality of sin.

Saint Paul states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). And, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jn 1:8).

No one can claim immunity from sin, not even after Baptism, which purified us from original sin. Our human nature, wounded by concupiscence, continually leads us to fall, to betray God's love through actions, words, omissions, and thoughts.



Saint Augustine writes, "It is true; man's nature was originally created without fault and without any vice. conversely, the present nature of man, through which everyone is born from Adam, now needs the Physician, because it is not healthy. Certainly, all the goods it possesses in its structure, in its life, senses, and mind, it receives from the supreme God, its creator and maker. The vice, however, which obscures and weakens these natural goods, thus making human nature needy of illumination and care, was not derived from its irreproachable maker, but from original sin which was committed through free will." (Nature and Grace).

Denying the existence of sin is tantamount to denying the truth about ourselves. Only by recognizing our need for forgiveness can we open ourselves to the mercy of God, who never tires of calling us back to Himself.

### **Confession: Encounter with Divine Mercy**

The Sacrament of Confession is, first and foremost, a personal encounter with Divine Mercy. It is not simply self-accusation or a session of self-analysis. It is an act of love from God who, like the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32), runs to meet the repentant child, embraces him, and clothes him with new dignity.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: *"Those who approach the sacrament of Penance obtain pardon from God's mercy for the offense committed against him, and are, at the same time, reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins and which by charity, by example, and by prayer cooperates for their conversion."* (CCC, 1422).

To confess is to allow oneself to be loved, healed, and renewed. It is to welcome the gift of a new heart.

### **Why Confess to a Priest?**

One of the most common objections is, "Why must I confess to a priest? Can't I confess directly to God?" Certainly, every

member of the faithful can – and should – turn directly to God with a prayer of repentance. However, Jesus established a concrete, visible, and sacramental means for forgiveness: confession to an ordained minister. And this applies to every Christian, meaning also priests, bishops, and popes.

The priest acts *in persona Christi*, that is, in the person of Christ Himself. He listens, judges, absolves, and offers spiritual counsel. This is not a human mediation that limits God's love, but rather a guarantee offered by Christ Himself; forgiveness is communicated visibly, and the faithful can have certainty of it.

Furthermore, confessing before a priest demands humility, an indispensable virtue for spiritual growth. Openly acknowledging one's faults frees us from the yoke of pride and opens us to the true freedom of the children of God.

It is not enough to confess only once a year, as required by the minimum of ecclesiastical law. The saints and spiritual masters have always recommended frequent confession – even bi-weekly or weekly – as a means of progress in the Christian life.

Saint John Paul II went to confession every week. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, despite being a Carmelite nun living in enclosure, confessed regularly. Frequent confession allows one to refine the conscience, correct ingrained faults, and receive new graces.

### **Obstacles to Confession**

Unfortunately, many faithful today neglect the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Among the main reasons are:

**Shame:** fearing the priest's judgment. But the priest is not there to condemn, but to be an instrument of mercy.

**Fear that confessed sins will be made public:** confessors cannot reveal to anyone, under any circumstances (including

the highest ecclesiastical authorities), the sins heard in confession, even at the cost of their own lives. If they do, they immediately incur *latae sententiae* excommunication (Canon 1386, Code of Canon Law). The inviolability of the sacramental seal admits no exceptions or dispensations. And the conditions are the same even if the Confession did not end with sacramental absolution. Even after the penitent's death, the confessor is bound to observe the sacramental seal.

***Lack of a sense of sin:*** in a culture that minimizes evil, one risks no longer recognizing the gravity of one's faults.

***Spiritual laziness:*** postponing Confession is a common temptation that leads to a cooling of the relationship with God.

***Erroneous theological convictions:*** some mistakenly believe that simply "repenting in one's heart" is sufficient without the need for sacramental Confession.

***Despair of salvation:*** Some think that for them, there will be no more forgiveness anyway. Saint Augustine says: "Indeed, some, after having fallen into sin, lose themselves even more through despair and not only neglect the medicine of repentance but become slaves to lusts and wicked desires to satisfy dishonest and reprehensible cravings, as if by not doing so they would lose even that to which lust incites them, convinced they are already on the brink of certain damnation. Against this extremely dangerous and harmful disease, the memory of the sins into which even the just and holy have fallen is beneficial." (ibid.)

To overcome these obstacles, one must seek advice from those who can give it, educate oneself, and pray.

### **Preparing Well for Confession**

A good confession requires adequate preparation, which includes:

**1. Examination of conscience:** sincerely reflecting on one's sins, perhaps aided by lists based on the Ten Commandments, the capital sins, or the Beatitudes.

**2. Contrition:** sincere sorrow for having offended God, not just fear of punishment.

**3. Purpose of amendment:** a real desire to change one's life, to avoid future sin.

**4. Integral confession of sins:** confessing all mortal sins completely, specifying their nature and number (if possible).

**5. Penance:** accepting and performing the act of reparation proposed by the confessor.

### **The Effects of Confession**

Confession does not merely produce an external cancellation of sin. The internal effects are profound and transformative:

**Reconciliation with God:** Sin breaks communion with God; Confession re-establishes it, bringing us back into full divine friendship.

**Inner peace and serenity:** Receiving absolution brings profound peace. The conscience is freed from the burden of guilt, and a new joy is experienced.

**Spiritual strength:** Through sacramental grace, the penitent receives special strength to fight future temptations and grow in virtue.

**Reconciliation with the Church:** Since every sin also damages the Mystical Body of Christ, Confession also mends our bond with the ecclesial community.

The spiritual vitality of the Church also depends on the personal renewal of its members. Christians who rediscover the Sacrament of Confession become, almost without realizing it, more open to others, more missionary, more capable of

radiating the light of the Gospel in the world.  
Only those who have experienced God's forgiveness can proclaim it convincingly to others.

The Sacrament of Confession is an immense and irreplaceable gift. It is the ordinary way through which Christians can return to God whenever they stray. It is not a burden, but a privilege; not a humiliation, but a liberation.

We are called, therefore, to rediscover this Sacrament in its truth and beauty, to practice it with an open and trusting heart, and to joyfully propose it also to those who have strayed. As the psalmist affirms, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Ps 32:1).

Today, more than ever, the world needs purified and reconciled souls, capable of testifying that God's mercy is stronger than sin. If we did not do so at Easter, let us take advantage of the Marian month of May and approach Confession without fear; there awaits us the smile of a Father who never stops loving us.

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## Habemus Papam: Leo XIV

On 8 May 2025, the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii, **Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost** (69) was elected as the **267<sup>th</sup> Pope**. He is the first Pope born in the United States and has chosen the name **Leo XIV**.

**Here is a brief biography**

**Birth:** 14 September 1955, Chicago (Illinois, USA)

**Family:** Louis Marius Prevost (of French and Italian origin)

and Mildred Martínez (of Spanish origin); brothers Louis Martín and John Joseph

**Languages:** English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and French; reads Latin and German

**Nickname in Peru:** '*Latin Yankee*' – a summary of his dual cultural identity

**Citizenship:** American and Peruvian

## **Education**

- Augustinian minor seminary (1973)
- Bachelor's degree in Mathematical Sciences, Villanova University (1977)
- Master of Divinity, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago (1982)
- Licentiate in Canon Law, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas – Angelicum (1984)
- Doctorate in Canon Law, Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas – Angelicum (1987), with a thesis entitled: 'The role of the local prior of the Order of St. Augustine'
- Religious profession: novitiate of Saint Louis of the Province of Our Lady of Good Counsel of the Order of Saint Augustine (1977)
- Solemn vows (29 August 1981)
- Priestly ordination: 19 June 1982, Rome (by Archbishop Jean Jadot)

## **Ministry and main appointments**

1985-1986: Missionary in Chulucanas, Piura (Peru)

1987: Director of vocations and director of missions of the Augustinian Province 'Mother of Good Counsel' in Olympia Fields, Illinois (USA)

1988: Sent to the mission in Trujillo (Peru) as director of the joint formation program for Augustinian aspirants from the Vicariates of Chulucanas, Iquitos, and Apurímac

1988-1992: Director of the community

1992-1998: Teacher of professed friars

1989-1998: Judicial Vicar in the Archdiocese of Trujillo,

professor of Canon Law, Patristics, and Morals at the Major Seminary 'San Carlos y San Marcelo'

1999: Provincial Prior of the Province "Mother of Good Counsel" (Chicago)

2001-2013: Prior General of the Augustinians for two terms (approx. 2,700 religious in 50 countries)

2013: Teacher of professed religious and Provincial Vicar in his Province (Chicago)

2014: Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo and Titular Bishop of Sufar, Peru (episcopal appointment on 3 November 2014)

2014: Episcopal consecration on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (12 December 2014)

2015: appointed bishop of Chiclayo (26 September 2015)

2018: 2<sup>nd</sup> vice-president of the Episcopal Conference of Peru (8 March 2018 – 30 January 2023)

2020: Apostolic Administrator of Callao, Peru (15 April 2020 – 17 April 2021)

2023: Archbishop ad personam (30 January 2023 – 30 September 2023)

2023: Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops (30 January 2023 [12 April 2023] – 9 May 2025)

2023: President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (30 January 2023 [12 April 2023] – 9 May 2025)

2023: Created Cardinal Deacon, titular of St. Monica of the Augustinians (30.09.2023 [28.01.2024] – 06.02.2025)

2025: Promoted to Cardinal Bishop of the Suburbicarian Diocese of Albano (06.02.2025 – 08.05.2025)

2025: Elected Supreme Pontiff (08.05.2025)

### **Service in the Roman Curia**

He was a member of the Dicasteries for Evangelization, Section for First Evangelization and New Churches; for the Doctrine of the Faith; for the Eastern Churches; for the Clergy; for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; for Culture and Education; for Legislative Texts, and of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State

May the Holy Spirit enlighten his ministry, as he did with the great Saint Augustine.

Let us pray for a fruitful pontificate rich with hope!

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# Election of the 266th Successor of Saint Peter

*Every death or resignation of a Pontiff opens one of the most delicate phases in the life of the Catholic Church: the election of the Successor of Saint Peter. Although the last conclave dates back to March 2013, when Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, understanding how a Pope is elected remains essential to grasp the functioning of a millennia-old institution that influences over 1.3 billion faithful and – indirectly – global geopolitics.*

## 1. The Vacant See

Everything begins with the **vacant see**, that is, the period between the death (or resignation) of the reigning Pontiff and the election of the new one. The apostolic constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, promulgated by John Paul II on February 22, 1996, and updated by Benedict XVI in 2007 and 2013, establishes detailed procedures.

### *Verification of the vacancy*

In case of death: the Cardinal Camerlengo – currently Cardinal Kevin Farrell – officially confirms the death, closes and seals the papal apartment, and notifies the Dean of the College of Cardinals.

In case of resignation: the vacant see begins at the time indicated in the resignation act, as happened at 8:00 PM on



February 28, 2013, for Benedict XVI.

### *Ordinary administration*

During the vacant see, the Camerlengo manages the material assets of the Holy See but cannot perform acts reserved exclusively for the Pontiff (such as episcopal appointments, doctrinal decisions, etc.).

### *General and particular congregations*

All cardinals – electors and non-electors – present in Rome gather in the Synod Hall to discuss urgent matters. The “particular” congregations include the Camerlengo and three cardinals drawn by lot in rotation; the “general” congregations summon the entire College of Cardinals and are used, among other things, to set the start date of the conclave.

## **2. Who can elect and who can be elected**

### *The electors*

Since Paul VI's motu proprio *Ingravescentem aetatem* (1970), **only cardinals who have not reached the age of 80 before the start of the vacant see have the right to vote.** The maximum number of electors is set at 120, but this can be temporarily exceeded due to closely spaced consistories.

Electors must:

- be present in Rome by the start of the conclave (except for serious reasons);
- take an oath of secrecy;
- stay at the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, the residence established by John Paul II to ensure dignity and discretion.

The enclosure is not a medieval whim: it aims to protect the cardinals' freedom of conscience and shield the Church from undue interference. Breaking the secrecy results in automatic excommunication.

### *Those eligible*

In theory, **any baptized male** can be elected Pope, since the

Petrine office is of divine right. However, from the Middle Ages to today, the Pope has always been chosen from among the cardinals. If a non-cardinal or even a layman were chosen, he would have to be immediately ordained a bishop.

### **3. The conclave: etymology, logistics, and symbolism**

The term “conclave” comes from the Latin *cum clave*, “with key”: the cardinals are “locked in” until the election to avoid external pressures. The enclosure is guaranteed by several rules:

- Allowed places: Sistine Chapel (voting), *Domus Sanctae Marthae* (lodging), a reserved path between the two buildings.
- Communication ban: electronic devices are collected, signal jammers used, *anti-spy controls* in place.
- Secrecy is also ensured by an oath that includes spiritual sanctions (*automatic* excommunication) and canonical penalties.

### **4. Typical agenda of the conclave**

1. “*Pro eligendo Pontifice*” Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on the morning of the entry into the conclave.
2. Procession in the Sistine Chapel reciting the *Veni Creator Spiritus*.
3. Individual oath of the cardinals, pronounced before the Gospel book.
4. *Extra omnes!* (“Everyone out!”): the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations dismisses those not entitled to stay.
5. First (optional) vote on the afternoon of the entry day.
6. Two daily votes (morning and afternoon) followed by the scrutiny (counting).

### **5. Voting procedure**

Each round follows four steps:

**5.1. *Praescrutinium*.** Distribution and filling out in Latin of the ballot “*Eligo in Summum Pontificem...*”.

**5.2. *Scrutinium*.** Each cardinal, carrying the folded ballot, says: “*Testor Christum Dominum...*”. He deposits the ballot in the urn.

**5.3. *Post-scrutinium*.** Three *scrutators* drawn by lot count the

ballots, read aloud each name, record it, and perforate the ballot with needle and thread.

**5.4. Burning.** Ballots and notes are burned in a special stove; the colour of the smoke indicates the result.

To be elected, a qualified majority is required, that is, two-thirds of valid votes.

## **6. The smoke: black waiting, white joy**

Since 2005, to make the signal unmistakable to the faithful in St. Peter's Square, a chemical reagent is added:

- Black smoke (*fumata nera*): no one elected.

- White smoke (*fumata bianca*): Pope elected; bells also ring.

After the white smoke, it takes another 30 minutes to an hour before the new Pope is announced by the Cardinal Deacon in St. Peter's Square. Shortly after (5 to 15 minutes), the new Pope appears to give the *Urbi et Orbi* blessing.

## **7. “*Acceptasne electionem?*” – Acceptance and pontifical name**

When someone reaches the required threshold, the Dean of the College of Cardinals (or the oldest by order and legal seniority if the Dean is the elected) asks: “*Acceptasne electionem de te canonice factam in Summum Pontificem?*” (Do you accept the canonically made election as Supreme Pontiff?). If the elected consents – *Accepto!* – he is asked: “*Quo nomine vis vocari?*” (By what name do you wish to be called?). Taking the name is an act full of theological and pastoral meanings: it recalls models (Francis of Assisi) or reform intentions (John XXIII).

## **8. Immediately following rites**

**8.1 Vesting.**

**8.2 Entry into the Chapel of Tears,** where the new Pope can recollect himself.

**8.3 Obedientia:** the electing cardinals file past for the first act of obedience.

**8.4 Announcement to the world:** the Protodeacon appears on the central balcony with the famous “*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum: habemus Papam!*”

## 8.5 First “*Urbi et Orbi*” blessing of the new Pontiff.

From that moment, he takes possession of the office and formally begins his pontificate, while the coronation with the pallium and the Fisherman’s ring takes place at the inauguration Mass (usually the following Sunday).

## 9. Some historical aspects and development of the norms

1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries: Acclamation by clergy and Roman people. In the absence of stable norms, imperial influence was strong.

1059 – *In nomine Domini*. College of Cardinals. Nicholas II limits lay intervention; official birth of the conclave.

1274 – *Ubi Periculum*. Mandatory enclosure. Gregory X reduces political manoeuvres, introduces seclusion.

1621–1622 – Gregory XV. Systematic secret ballot. Improvement of ballots; two-thirds requirement.

1970 – Paul VI. Age limit of 80 years. Reduces electorate, favouring quicker decisions.

1996 – John Paul II. *Universi Dominici Gregis*. Modern codification of the process, introduces *Domus Sanctae Marthae*.

## 10. Some concrete data of this Conclave

Living cardinals: 252 (average age: 78.0 years).

Voting cardinals: 134 (135). Cardinal Antonio Cañizares Llovera, Archbishop Emeritus of Valencia, Spain, and Cardinal John Njue, Archbishop Emeritus of Nairobi, Kenya, have announced that they will not be able to participate in the conclave.

Of the 135 voting cardinals, 108 (80%) were appointed by Pope Francis. 22 (16%) were appointed by Pope Benedict XVI. The remaining 5 (4%) were appointed by Pope Saint John Paul II.

Of the 135 voting cardinals, 25 participated as electors in the 2013 Conclave.

Average age of the 134 participating cardinal electors: 70.3 years.

Average years of service as cardinal of the 134 participating cardinal electors: 7.1 years.

Average length of a papacy: about 7.5 years.

Start of the Conclave: May 7, Sistine Chapel.

Voting cardinals in the Conclave: 134. Number of votes required for election is two-thirds, i.e., 89 votes.

Voting schedule: 4 votes per day (2 in the morning, 2 in the afternoon).

After 3 full days (to be defined), voting is suspended for a full day ("to allow a prayer pause, informal discussion among electors, and a brief spiritual exhortation").

Then follow 7 more ballots and another pause up to a full day.

Then 7 more ballots and another pause up to a full day.

Then 7 more ballots and then a pause to evaluate how to proceed.

## **11. Unwritten "internal" dynamics**

Despite the strict legal framework, the choice of the Pope is a spiritual but also a human process influenced by:

- Profiles of candidates ("papabili"): geographic origin, pastoral experience, doctrinal competence.
- Ecclesial currents: curial or pastoral, reformist or conservative, liturgical sensitivities.
- Global agenda : ecumenical relations, inter-religious dialogue, social crises (migrants, climate change).
- Languages and personal networks: cardinals tend to gather by region (the "Latin American" group, "African" group, etc.) and meet informally during meals or "walks" in the Vatican gardens.

## **A spiritual and institutional event together**

The election of a Pope is not a technical step comparable to a corporate assembly. Despite the human dimension, it is a **spiritual act essentially guided by the Holy Spirit.**

The care of minute rules – from sealing the Sistine doors to burning the ballots – shows how the Church has transformed its long historical experience into a system now perceived as stable and solemn.

Knowing how a Pope is chosen, therefore, is not just curiosity: it is understanding the dynamic between authority, collegiality, and tradition that supports the oldest religious institution still operating worldwide. And, in an age of dizzying changes, that “little smoke” rising from the roof of the Sistine Chapel continues to remind us that centuries-old decisions can still speak to the hearts of billions, inside and outside the Church.

May this knowledge of the data and procedures help us to pray more deeply, as one should pray before every important decision that affects our life.