

“Shock as Pope resigns”

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected as Pope on Tuesday 19 April, 2005. The Pope is leader of the Roman Catholic Church and the Successor of Saint Peter, the first century Galilean fisherman Jesus entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven and chosen to be the leader of the Apostles. Pope Benedict XVI was the 265th Successor of Saint Peter. Today there are over one billion Roman Catholics.

On Monday 11 February, 2013, Pope Benedict announced his decision to step down from this responsibility. It was a great shock to Catholics. A Pontificate or the Pope’s ministry usually ends with the Pope’s death.



The last Pope to resign was Pope Celestine V in the thirteenth century. He was Pope from July – December 1294. He was a hermit when he was elected to be Pope at 80 years of age. When he resigned he was forced in a form of house arrest until his death in May 1296.

During the last 8 years Pope Benedict has accomplished a great deal. He has had a number of Apostolic Visits to various countries including Australia, the United States, Brazil, the Holy Land, Benin, and in September 2010 he visited the United Kingdom and celebrated Mass in Birmingham.

In his Pontificate he initiated yearlong celebrations acknowledging Saint Paul and the Catholic Priesthood; he created a special place of welcome for members of the Anglican communion who wanted to be Catholics; he permitted the celebration of the Tridentine Rite of the Sacraments; he wrote about the figure and message of Jesus of Nazareth in his international best-selling trilogy; and he initiated the current Year of Faith and New Evangelisation.

Conclave

At a date to be announced, but before Easter, those Cardinals of the Church; those under 80 years of age will be called to the Vatican to elect a new Pope. This meeting is called the Conclave. The word "Conclave" comes from two Latin words meaning "with key".

The Conclave takes place in secrecy. The Cardinals have no contact with the outside world; there are a few assistants known as Conclavists. The Cardinals meet twice a day in the Sistine Chapel under Michelangelo's fresco of the "Last Judgement".



Twice every day during the Conclave the Cardinals hold an election. There are currently 118 Cardinal – electors. A vote of two –thirds majority plus one is required for a candidate to be elected.

The Cardinals' only contact with the outside world is a small chimney in the corner of the Sistine Chapel. When a vote is inconclusive the ballot papers are burned with straw to create black smoke which is the signal to the outside world that no one has

been elected. When a vote is conclusive the ballot papers are burned without straw creating white smoke which is the signal that a new Pope has been elected. Since 2005 the bells at the Vatican are rung at the same time.

At the end of the election, and after the white smoke is seen, the senior Cardinal Deacon makes the announcement, "Habemus Papam!" "We have a Pope!"

Fr Martin
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