

Habebimus Papam

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After Pope Francis's death, high-ranking officials in the Catholic Church, called Cardinals, are gathering in the Vatican. At first, they were planning the funeral of the deceased pope, but now, they are preparing to enter a conclave to elect a new pope.

As with many words used in the Church, 'conclave' comes from Latin, meaning 'with a key,' which signifies the isolation that the cardinals are locked into until they figure out who will become the pope. During the first day of the conclave, the cardinals will attend Mass and proceed with one round of voting. Every day after the first, they will vote twice in the morning and twice in the afternoon until someone receives at least two-thirds of the votes, at which point that person becomes the pope. The outside world will only know if there has been a successful election of a pope by looking at a chimney set up on the roof of the Sistine Chapel, where the conclave takes place. If there is black smoke, then there is no new pope, but white smoke indicates a new pontiff.

In the lead-up to a conclave, perhaps the most discussed topic is the *papabili*, or the pope-ables. Cardinals who are considered *papabile* are the favorites to become pope. However, there is no consensus on who is *papabile* from person to person, publication to publication. There is also the reality that more often than not, *papabili* do not become pope. The famous Pope St. John Paul II was not considered a favorite, and even Pope Francis in 2013 was not a commonly-discussed name, though he was not a complete dark horse. In 2025, some of the *papabili* include Cardinals Pietro Parolin from Italy, Luis Antonio Tagle from the Philippines, Péter Erdő from Hungary, Peter Turkson from Ghana, and Pierbattista Pizzaballa of Jerusalem.

Pietro Parolin was the Vatican's Secretary of State, in charge of international diplomacy, for most of Francis' papacy. He is considered a moderate who understands the inner workings of the governance of the church and is considered palatable to most cardinals. Luis Antonio Tagle is one of the most Francis-like of the cardinals, and his election would be considered a continuation of the reforms started by Pope Francis. In contrast, Péter Erdő is one of the most vocal critics of Francis, and his election would signal a return to traditions such as the Latin Mass and more

conservative teachings. If Peter Turkson emerges as pope, it would mean a recognition and cementation of the Catholic Church's growing influence in Africa and the growing African influence on the Catholic Church. He supports generally traditional church teachings, but he would likely assume a welcoming pastoral role akin to Francis. Pierbattista Pizzaballa became known to the world at the onset of the Israel– Hamas War when he offered himself to Hamas to free captives. His selection would steer the Vatican towards peace missions in warring nations like Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Hamas, Sudan, South Sudan, and others.

Potentially as significant as the person who assumes the papacy is the papal name he chooses, which indicates what kind of pope he hopes to be. Even though Pope Francis is popular among Catholics, his papacy is considered controversial, which likely means that there will not be a Francis II, no matter who is elected. A new John is viewed as a possibility, especially if the new pope sees himself as a pastoral figure rather than a doctrinal figure. For the doctrinal popes, there are the names Leo and Pius, as popes bearing those names have promulgated some significant documents that are still a source of theology within the church. A pope who wants to be between those two poles might choose the name John Paul, but the legacy of the aforementioned John Paul II might make that choice improbable. An interesting but extremely unlikely choice would be Paschal as the new pope will be elected during the Easter season, and he could highlight the theological importance of Easter. As Pope Francis showed in 2013, however, the pope could also choose a name that has never been chosen before, but as with most things about the conclave, there will not be any answer until the end of the process.