We are certain: it is the eternal Pastor who leads his flock with the power of his Spirit and assures it in every age to the Pastors whom he has chosen.

—Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Members of the College of Cardinals, April 22, 2005
What are the most important elements of the “interregnum,” or transition period between popes?

- At the beginning of the “sede vacante,” the College of Cardinals assumes governance of the church.
- The Roman Curia loses most cardinal supervisors and cannot act on new matters.
- The College of Cardinals begins daily meetings at the Vatican to deal with limited church business and conclave arrangements.
- Cardinals under 80 years of age enter into conclave 15-20 days after the beginning of the “sede vacante.”
- Voting for a new pope proceeds with two ballots each morning and afternoon; a two-thirds majority is needed to elect.
- Shortly after the pope is elected, his name is announced and he offers his first blessing to the world in St. Peter’s Square.

**PRAYER FOR THE ELECTION OF A NEW POPE**

*Roman Missal, Collect*

God, eternal shepherd, who govern your flock with unfailing care, grant in your boundless fatherly love a pastor for your Church who will please you by his holiness and to us show watchful care.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

**H ow a Pope is Named**

*Universi Dominici Gregis, No. 87*

When the election has canonically taken place . . . the Cardinal who is first in order and seniority, in the name of the whole College of electors, then asks the consent of the one elected in the following words: “Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?” And, as soon as he has received the consent, he asks him, “By what name do you wish to be called?” Then, the Master of Papal Liturgical Celebrations . . . draws up a document certifying acceptance by the new Pope and the name taken by him.

**Reflection from Pope Benedict XVI**

*Audience with German Pilgrims, April 25, 2005*

At the beginning of my journey in a ministry that I never even imagined and for which I felt inadequate, all of this gives me great strength and assistance. May God reward you for this!

When, little by little, the trend of the voting led me to understand that, to say it simply, the axe was going to fall on me, my head began to spin. I was convinced that I had already carried out my life’s work and could look forward to ending my days peacefully. With profound conviction I said to the Lord: Do not do this to me! You have younger and better people at your disposal, who can face this great responsibility with greater dynamism and greater strength.

I was then very touched by a brief note written to me by a brother cardinal. He reminded me that on the occasion of the Mass for John Paul II, I had based my homily, starting from the Gospel, on the Lord’s words to Peter by the Lake of Gennesaret: “Follow me!” I spoke of how again and again, Karol Wojtyła received this call from the Lord, and how each time he had to renounce much and to simply say: Yes, I will follow you, even if you lead me where I never wanted to go.

This brother cardinal wrote to me: Were the Lord to say to you now, “Follow me,” then remember what you preached. Do not refuse! Be obedient in the same way that you described the great Pope, who has returned to the house of the Father. This deeply moved me. The ways of the Lord are not easy, but we were not created for an easy life, but for great things, for goodness.

Thus, in the end I had to say “yes.” I trust in the Lord and I trust in you, dear friends. A Christian is never alone.

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