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Passing on the Keys

By Gary Shirley

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It's election year in America. Time to endure that painful process where politicians, pollsters and pundits all vie for the national spotlight. Truth is stretched beyond recognition. Promises made tend to vaporize. We are reminded daily that chaos will prevail if we do not elect this or that enlightened candidate to save the nation.

Given our relative success with this "experiment in liberty," we Americans may think that elected office is our own invention. Fact is, this young republic is still on training wheels. The Catholic Church has trod this path for the better part of two millennia. Perhaps it is worth revisiting the oldest electoral process in the world, which gives one billion Catholics their Supreme Pontiff. The Apostolic Constitution *Universi Dominici Gregis*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II on February 22, 1996, provides clear guidance on how the Church is to go about selecting the next Vicar of Christ.

The passing of a pope is one of those moments that can virtually define an era. It is among the pivotal events that serve as milestones in a life span, such as JFK's fateful visit to Dallas, Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon, or the Dow passing the 10,000 mark. A vacancy in the See of Peter prompts an outpouring of love coupled with a whirlwind of speculation. It closes the door of history and opens the window of opportunity. First, however, we grieve.

The Apostolic Constitution prescribes a nine day mourning period in honor of the deceased pope, with burial to occur between the fourth and sixth days. This duration has both a devotional aspect and a practical one. Proper mourning protocols must be observed for this citizen of the world. As the pope is a Head of State, the Vatican will serve as host to both secular and religious leaders who attend the funeral rites and pay the respects of their particular society. With few exceptions, the business of the Church is essentially stopped during this time of reflection and prayer. Even any Councils or Synods in progress are immediately suspended until approved to continue by the new pope.

This period of time is largely overseen by an individual known as the Cardinal "Camerlengo" or Chamberlain. His job, as described in the Apostolic Constitution, is "...safeguarding and administering the goods and temporal rights of the Holy See." He meets with the College of Cardinals to decide

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issues that include funeral and internment details, approval of expenditures, destruction of the Fisherman's Ring, lodging assignments for the arriving electors and selection of the theologians who will prepare the two key meditations. These meditations are mandated by the Constitution and will ultimately be delivered to the gathered College of Cardinals. The meditations focus on the problems facing the Church and the need for discernment in the coming election. Given that the Cardinal electors hail from every corner of the globe, these meditations will help them to understand the "State of the Church."

The College of Cardinals is restricted by the Constitution to a total of 120 eligible voters. As long as a Cardinal has not yet reached his 80th birthday on the day of the pope's death, he may cast a vote in the election. Thanks to the vision of Pope John Paul II, the College enjoys a multi-national composition, which is sure to translate into a rich harvest of qualified papabile, or papal candidates. Not all Cardinals

are bishops, so it is possible that the electors could choose a man for the papacy who does not possess the highest degree of Holy Orders. As the pope is first and foremost the Bishop of Rome, the Apostolic Constitution calls for the immediate episcopal consecration of the new Pontiff, if necessary.

The electoral process must begin no sooner than 15 and no later than 20 days after the death of the pope. The election takes place in the Sistine Chapel. During the proceedings the Cardinals will be required to lodge in the Vatican City State, primarily in the newly-constructed Domus Sanctae Marthae residence. This is to ensure a degree of isolation from outside influences as they undertake their sacred duty. The electors are restricted from using any method of personal communication or being exposed to the newspaper, radio, television or Internet. They may not even be approached for conversation as they proceed each day from their lodging to the Sistine Chapel.

The papal election process begins with a solemn Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. This is followed by a dignified procession of the Princes of the Church into the Sistine Chapel. Here sacred oaths are administered to each elector and associated papal staff to ensure the perpetual secrecy of the proceedings. Once these tasks are completed, staff members are dismissed and the chapel doors are locked forthwith. The conclave (from cum clave, "with a key") now begins.

Absent any questions on election procedure from the Cardinals, the balloting begins immediately. Total secrecy is paramount. Each elector casts a single handwritten vote, carrying it forward to be placed in a designated vessel for counting. One by one the votes are checked, re-checked and recorded aloud. The ballots are then pierced with a needle and gathered together on one thread to preclude any being misplaced. On the first day of the conclave, only one ballot is taken. Each subsequent day will include two ballots in the morning and two in the afternoon, as necessary.

The gathering in the Sistine Chapel is not about speeches, debates or discussion. It is about discerning the will of the Holy Spirit and reflecting that will in a ballot. Throughout this process, the Cardinals assemble for each session and vote immediately. Should the vote not yield a clear winner, the second vote is taken with no delay.

A two-thirds majority is necessary for election. Should the number of electors not be divisible by three, then two-thirds majority plus one additional vote are required. Should a pope not be elected in three

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days, the conclave will enter a day of prayer and dialogue. The Constitution then allows for another seven balloting opportunities (three additional days). These are again followed by another day of prayer should no pope be chosen. On several occasions in Church history the process of selecting a pope has gone on for years!

Given the global presence of the papacy, the outside world anxiously awaits the results of the voting. Television cameras remain focused on the chimney of the Sistine Chapel, awaiting a simple, yet telling, billow of smoke. If no pope is elected during a particular session, all the paper ballots are burned along with some straw, giving off black smoke. Success in electing a pope is indicated by all the paper ballots being burned alone, resulting in white smoke. Just prior to that moment, two important questions had been asked of the man so chosen: "Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?" A positive response is followed by the second query, "By what name do you wish to be called?" These answered, the newly-elected pope immediately possesses the full and universal authority of the office.

Once he is duly empowered, the Cardinals come forward one by one to offer homage and pledge obedience to the new Vicar of Christ. Papal tailors are standing by to outfit His Holiness for the official introduction to the world. In short order, the announcement goes out from the Apostolic Palace to the

crowd in St. Peter's Square and to the world, *Habemus papem* ("We have a pope"). The new Holy Father steps out onto his balcony and greets the faithful while offering his blessing, *Urbi et Orbi*, "to the City and the World."

It has been over twenty-five years since the last papal conclave. Technology has taken quantum leaps. Empires have imploded. Kings, presidents and prime ministers have come and gone. Still, Holy Mother Church goes on, protecting and promulgating the truth and promise of Jesus Christ. She ensures that the line of leadership succession from St. Peter continues through the ages by providing the world's Catholics with visible authority. For our part, we extend a welcome and offer a prayer for the newest Vicar of Christ and "Servant of the Servants of God."

About the Author: Gary Shirley, his wife, and three children are members of St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Kennesaw, Georgia, where Gary serves as catechist in the adult education program. Gary is an Archdiocese of Atlanta certified catechist (both PSR and RCIA) with 13 years teaching experience.

Taking A Vacation To The Florida Keys With Your Family Is Fun

By Kyle Greatbatch

If you are looking for some of the most beautiful and enjoyable spots in the world, you must cast your net to Florida Keys. This exotic location stretches from the South of the mainland, and in reality Florida Keys is a chain of many enchanting Islands.

Geographically, the Florida Keys consists of five major groups of Islands which are Islamorada, Marathon, Lower Keys, and Key West. All these areas are collectively known as Key Largo.

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If you are game in this adventure, then the journey commences from Miami, which is only a short distance from the city of Key Largo. This city provides a more relaxed atmosphere, and is a welcomed relief away from the hustle and bustle of daily life. Florida Keys is just completely different from any one you've ever known.

But your stay should not be restricted to just the Key Largo, you need to explore the complete "keys" which is about 160 miles from Miami. However, every mile you cover takes you close to paradise. No place can really compare to Florida Keys in the world.

Hawaii and the Bahamas have been hyped as the best tropical resorts, but I make bold to say that nothing can be farther from the truth. Florida Keys as a vacation spot offer practically everything you might need; a good night life, and if you like secluded beaches, they don't come much better than those at Islamorada or Marathon Islands. And talking of costs, Florida Keys provides a wide range of lodgings and private homes for rent.

For those with luxurious tastes, the Florida Keys boasts of several five–star lodgings that can match even the requirements of kings. Folks who prefer austere accommodations, there are several rustic lodgings in Florida Keys. However, it is needles to remind you that the best places outdoor in Florida Keys remain its lovely beaches. The coast line is very vast because the Island is bordered on the east by the Atlantic Ocean and on the western tip by the Gulf of Mexico.

Sporting facilities and activities abound in the Florida Keys for adventurous people. Fishing, diving, and swimming are the most common activities, probably due to the pristine waters of the Florida Keys.

Besides sporting activities, there are other interesting sights in Florida Keys. Each community in this Island seems to have its cultural events that families can enjoy. Several artists and artisans domiciled in the Island have also made Florida Keys a renowned place. Thus no matter what your interest is, there is always something for everyone.

The variety of experiences that abounds is the best thing about Florida Keys, strictly from a vacationer's point of view. And judging by the influx of holiday makers into the Island, one would think the whole area is on vacation throughout the year. This independence in Florida Keys that surely comes from being very far from the big cities, which probably explains why residents of Florida Keys refer to their Island as the 51st state in the Union.

When you visit Florida Keys, the only problem you might encounter is the dilemma of whether to return back home! Because Florida Keys is a very magical place.

Article written by Kyle Greatbatch



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