

Who is the pope? Rather, who am I?

Talk of the Conclave and the National Football League player draft revved up during the same week. The jargon of the latter selection process has infected the former. Quite a contrast from the apostles prayerfully drawing straws to pick the successor to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26). It is likely that some touts will have handicapped Cardinals like the thoroughbreds in the May 3rd Kentucky Derby. Amusing, perhaps. Vulgar, yes. The Conclave itself will start May 7th.

The media have been understandably interested in the death of one pope, and the selection of the next. Commentaries continue to assay Francis's stewardship, describe interregnum processes, and speculate about what kind of pope we need. The stale chatter persists about liberal and conservative religious categories, disconnected from substantive definition and historical contexts. We are better off admitting biases reinforced by our living in a two-party system, or by reducing each human encounter to a win-lose wrestling match.

I am quite interested in the next choice of a Holy Father. As Cardinal Dolan says, "The Holy Spirit already knows who the next pope is. The Cardinals go to Rome to try to learn who that is." I will pray for and with those who meet in the Conclave. But my prayer time has redirected my meditations. I wonder less about the identity of the new pope and more about my own. My questions are not about who the next pope will be, but who will I be? My heart and soul are with Christ. And with Mary, who might have pondered what Jesus saw in any of his Apostles, much less their successors.

Even our Catholic media can have us living minute to minute in Rome amid the speculation about Cardinals and insider maneuvering. The movie "Conclave," advertised as a 'mystery-thriller,' is a story crafted to sell tickets and streaming subscriptions. We should have a problem with anything that draws us away from our ongoing conversion.

Who will Tim Doherty be when the election is over? Will I have to go back and reread my signed profession of faith and loyalty oath? Will I be docile (meaning,

teachable) before religious authority and expertise that exceed my own? Will I be tempted to comment about the character of a man whom I have never met, whose body of work is unknown to me? My work will always be to sit before God and take care of the people and work right here. The next pope will be the eighth one in my life to this point. Each one has shined a different light on the person of Christ who forever enters our world to heal it, save it, salvation it.

In the coming days, my meditations will be informed by a 2024 document by the International Theological Commission. It is “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour: 1700th anniversary of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea 325-2025.” Read at least its “Conclusion: Proclaiming Jesus our Salvation to everyone today.” Our personal relation to Christ-in-his-Church will provide a better measure for what should happen in Rome or our diocesan chancery as events unfold. We cannot know the pope’s mission if we do not know our own.

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