

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week the cardinals of our church will gather in the Sistine Chapel to participate in the ancient ceremony to elect a new successor of Peter. It is a good opportunity for them to re-assess the role of the pope in the modern age and to invoke the Holy Spirit's guidance in their deliberations.

It is also a good opportunity for the faithful to remember several important things. Firstly, Pope Benedict reminded us that the pope is not chosen by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is invoked to guide the cardinals in their choice, but history shows us that there is plenty of room for human frailty within the process. In the past, bribery and coercion has been involved and sometimes the process was infected with the influence of worldly ideologies, political pressures, and interference from outside parties. The upshot of this is that, while we pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance, we also allow that the best candidate may be overlooked or marginalized by nefarious agents. It is also possible for a mediocre, weak or even bad man to be elected.

In remembering this we must also remember that St. Peter himself was a weak and frail human vessel and that all of us are sinners in need of redemption and divine assistance.

With all this in mind I ask you to pray this week, imploring the Lord to oversee and direct this important election. Whatever the outcome, we should also keep in mind the proper extent and power of the pope. It is easy, in this age of celebrity culture to give the pope undue influence. Yes, he is the leader of over a billion Catholics worldwide and is the only global representative of our Christian faith. We look to him for moral guidance, the defense of the historic faith, and for a clear moral and doctrinal example. However, the pope is not God.

Pope Benedict once corrected a young priest who assumed that the pope had great - even absolute power. Benedict said gently that he actually had very little power. The practical, day to day decisions and actions were most important and most of these were outside his control. This is a good reminder to us therefore, that the Pope is in Rome, and we thank God for the papacy, but the Catholic faith is real only where it is local. It is here, in our parish, in our families, in our school and in our city that we have the power to live out our Catholic faith with courage, zeal and compassion.

May God bless the cardinals and whoever they elect as our new pope, but it is at Our Lady of the Rosary, Greenville that we do what we can, with what we have, where we are.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker