

The New Pope: What Just Happened and Why It Matters

By Lily Allen

A bell tolling over St. Peter's Basilica, a puff of white smoke, and suddenly a new leader for the 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide. This resource is your resource for learning about what happened in Vatican City, the process of choosing a new pope, and the significance of this moment that goes much beyond the Church, regardless of whether you're a devout believer, an inquisitive spectator, or just interested in the recent events.

What's a Pope and Why Is It a Big Deal?

The pope is one of the most influential people in the world in addition to being a spiritual leader. The pope oversees the spiritual lives of innumerable people worldwide in his capacity as head of the Roman Catholic Church. But the position is not limited to religion; the pope has considerable moral and diplomatic clout and frequently speaks out on issues pertaining to social justice, human rights, and world politics.

Even though many people may be aware of the pope's spiritual duties, which include leading mass, offering prayers, and overseeing church instruction, his influence goes beyond the Vatican. He often meets with world leaders, advocates for peace in combat zones, and uses his platform to address global concerns like poverty, climate change, and the refugee crisis. The pope is a powerful figure on a global scale and stands for Catholic unity.

How a New Pope Is Chosen

The process of selecting a new leader starts when a pope's reign ends, whether by resignation or death. Cardinals, the top bishops of the Catholic Church, gather for the papal conclave, a highly secret gathering when the new pope is chosen.

The Conclave Procedure:

The meeting takes place at the Vatican in private. Cardinals under the age of 80 are the only ones allowed to vote, and they do so in total secrecy. In order to prevent any information leaks, the cardinals promise to maintain confidentiality during the voting process, which could take many days.

Conversations and prayers open the assembly. The voting procedure then starts. The votes are counted when each cardinal writes the name of the candidate they have chosen. A candidate needs a two-thirds majority to win the election. The cardinals may hold more talks to choose a new candidate if a majority isn't reached after multiple voting rounds.

The Smoke Signals:

The use of smoke signals to announce the vote is a very familiar conclave tradition. The smoke rising from the Sistine Chapel's chimney will be black, signifying that the vote was failed, if the cardinals have not reached a resolution. The world waits expectantly for the announcement when the smoke turns white, signifying that the process is complete and a new pope has been chosen.

The New Pope: Key Facts

With the conclave now over, the new pope is presented to the world. Here's what you should be aware of regarding him:

Name: Usually inspired by a previous pope or saint, the recently appointed pope takes on a papal name. The incoming pope's intended course of governance is often indicated by this term. Pope Francis, for example, chose the name in honour of St. Francis of Assisi, who is known for his commitment to poverty alleviation and compassion for the underprivileged.

Nationality: Although many popes have come from Italy, there has been a current shift towards a more global pontiff. Any country may produce the next pope, demonstrating the Church's expanding global reach.

Background: The new head of the Church was most likely a cardinal with significant positions in the Vatican or the Church hierarchy before taking up the papacy. Many popes have strong academic backgrounds, usually in philosophy or theology, and have served as cardinals or bishops in a variety of countries throughout the world.

What Happens Now?

One of the most anticipated events following the announcement of the new pope is his first public appearance. This usually takes place on the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, when the recently elected pope greets the assembly and gives a brief speech. The pope may offer a prayer for harmony or discuss his vision for the future of the Church.

The recently elected pope will begin setting the tone for his pontificate in the coming days. This could entail addressing important issues inside the Church, such as handling sexual abuse cases, advancing women's status within the Church, and handling the complexities of global politics. Both Catholics and the broader public will likely scrutinise the pope's first moves in an attempt to determine how he plans to address the enduring problems facing the Church.

Why It Matters (Even If You're Not Religious)

Even though the pope is mainly in charge of the Roman Catholic Church, his influence extends far beyond the boundaries of the Vatican. Being one of the most influential people in the world, the pope has the ability to impact global conversations on a wide range of topics that affect people from all origins and faiths.

Worldwide Impact:

An important role in foreign diplomacy is played by the pope. He interacts with world leaders in politics to advance justice, peace, and human rights. Through his words and deeds, the pope may draw attention to problems like poverty, conflict, and climate change. His influence resonates with people all throughout the world, regardless of their religious beliefs, and goes beyond Catholics.

The pope's position also makes him a prominent figure in discussions about social issues and human rights. Pope Francis, for instance, has been a strong advocate for environmental causes, supporting actions to battle climate change and pushing for a more sustainable future. His views on immigration, economic inequality, and social justice have sparked conversations and produced positive improvements.

A Representation of Togetherness:

The pope is not only a leader but also a symbol of moral guidance and solidarity for millions of people worldwide. In his writings, talks, and deeds, the pope acts as a moral voice for a divided globe. His call for compassion, harmony, and peace resonates with a broad spectrum of people, making his pontificate a point of reference even for non-Catholics.