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Waiting . . .for the New Pope

It has been over a quarter of a century since we have waited for a new pope. Millions of young Catholics never lived during the pontificate of any pope other than John Paul II. Speculation is intense. Conjecture varies from the sublime to the ridiculous to the bizarre.

Now that our Cardinal-electors are not speaking to the media all sorts of trivia become fair game for reporters looking for a scoop. The gambling world is offering odds not only on the identity of the new pope but even on the next papal name.

Many, no doubt influenced by some arcane oracle, are convinced that the new pope will be a lean man. I doubt if this prediction will persuade a cardinal or two to go on a crash diet!

Some commentators are quite imperious in their demands telling the cardinals the kind of person they expect them to elect. In other words, they want somebody who agrees with their agenda. Others, betraying an abysmal lack of knowledge about the doctrine and the discipline of the Church, are not shy in listing the changes they feel the new pope should adopt almost before he gets sized for the Fisherman's Ring.

I have no doubt that our cardinals will prayerfully approach their awesome task with great seriousness and responsibility. I also have no doubt that in the last analysis they too will be relying on help from the Holy Spirit. They will be trying to discover the one whom God wants simply because their selection will be, as we believe, Christ's Vicar on earth.

Our God is a God of surprises when it comes to the chosen of papal elections. History teaches us that we should never underestimate the ability of God to thwart the perceived intentions of the electors.

When Pius IX died in 1878, after the longest pontificate in history, the cardinals opted for a so-called transitional pope. They elected Leo XIII. His papacy lasted over 25 years until he died in 1903 at the age of 93. Something similar happened in 1958. The cardinals elected the now beatified 76 year old John XXIII. His papacy lasted less than five years but nobody expected he would call the Second Vatican Council, the most far reaching and significant event of the Church in many centuries.

I readily recall the ridicule with which the cassandras of the world greeted John Paul II in 1978. Polish jokes, barbed with not a little derision, dominated the media. I heard no Polish jokes at his funeral! Weren't we lucky that Christ himself selected Peter as our first pope. I am afraid that the self-righteous of our society would have rejected him as too hot-tempered or unreliable.

In the light of the foregoing here is my prayer for these days of waiting:

GOD OUR FATHER
Your Church needs another Peter to be the
VICAR OF YOUR SON.

All we ask is that he be a
POPE
richly endowed with all the gifts of the
HOLY SPIRIT.

It matters least to us
whether he is fat or skinny, tall or short,
relatively old or relatively young,
as long as he is blessed with
all the gifts of the
HOLY SPIRIT.

His nationality, his intellectual
achievements and his linguistic skills
are of lesser consequence to us
than that he be a shepherd
constantly nurtured by all the gifts of the
HOLY SPIRIT.

Aware that for some he will be too conservative
and for others he will be too liberal
and knowing that like
CHRIST
he will be embraced by many
and rejected by others.

FATHER
We ask you to give us a new
BISHOP OF ROME
who is close to the heart of
CHRIST
and fortified by all the gifts of the
HOLY SPIRIT.

AMEN