

Habemus papam...again!

By Allen Dvorak

Habemus papam. Those Latin words were spoken this past week from the balcony of the papal chambers to announce that “we have a pope.” The college of cardinals had voted to elect Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the next leader of the Catholic Church. The announcement of the identity of the new pope was met with enthusiastic celebration from the hundreds of thousands who had crowded into St. Peter’s Square, waiting in the rain at times for the decision.

In fact, the whole world seems to have been focused on the recent events in Vatican City. Cardinal Bergoglio was chosen in the 2013 papal conclave after just five votes by the college of cardinals. Previous selection processes have sometimes taken much longer and many more unsuccessful (not resulting in a recognized majority) votes by the cardinals.

I wonder how many people are asking the obvious question, “Where in the Scriptures do we read about the whole papal selection process?” Of course, the fact that the Scriptures say nothing about an election of one man by the college of cardinals for the purpose of ruling as supreme pontiff of the universal church should hardly surprise us, since the same Scriptures say nothing about cardinals...or archbishops...or metropolitans...or patriarchs (as an office of the church)...or even the Vatican City!

It is my understanding that the college of cardinals supposedly acts for God in their choice of the next pope. Was God unclear about His choice of Jorge Bergoglio as the next pope so that it required five votes before the divine will became obvious? I speak facetiously. The general public will probably never know if the final vote was unanimous in favor of Bergoglio. If it was not unanimous, who was guiding the minority, the ones who voted for someone other than Bergoglio?

It is likely that many people don’t know that the selection of popes has followed different procedures over the centuries. The criteria to determine which cardinals could vote for a new pope has changed. Even the method by which the vote is to take place has varied from time to time, with acclamation, committee vote and plenary vote being acceptable methods until John Paul II abolished the options of acclamation and committee vote. Just an observation...when Judas was replaced by Matthias, the disciples cast lots to determine which of the two qualified men (see Acts 1:21- 22), Barsabas or Matthias, was the Lord’s choice to take Judas’ place. There is no indication in the text that they cast lots multiple times, nor did they “vote” for one man or the other.

Acknowledging that the Scriptures say nothing about a pope, nor the college of cardinals selection process, I wonder why the Catholic Church doesn’t just cast lots to let the world know whom the Lord chooses?