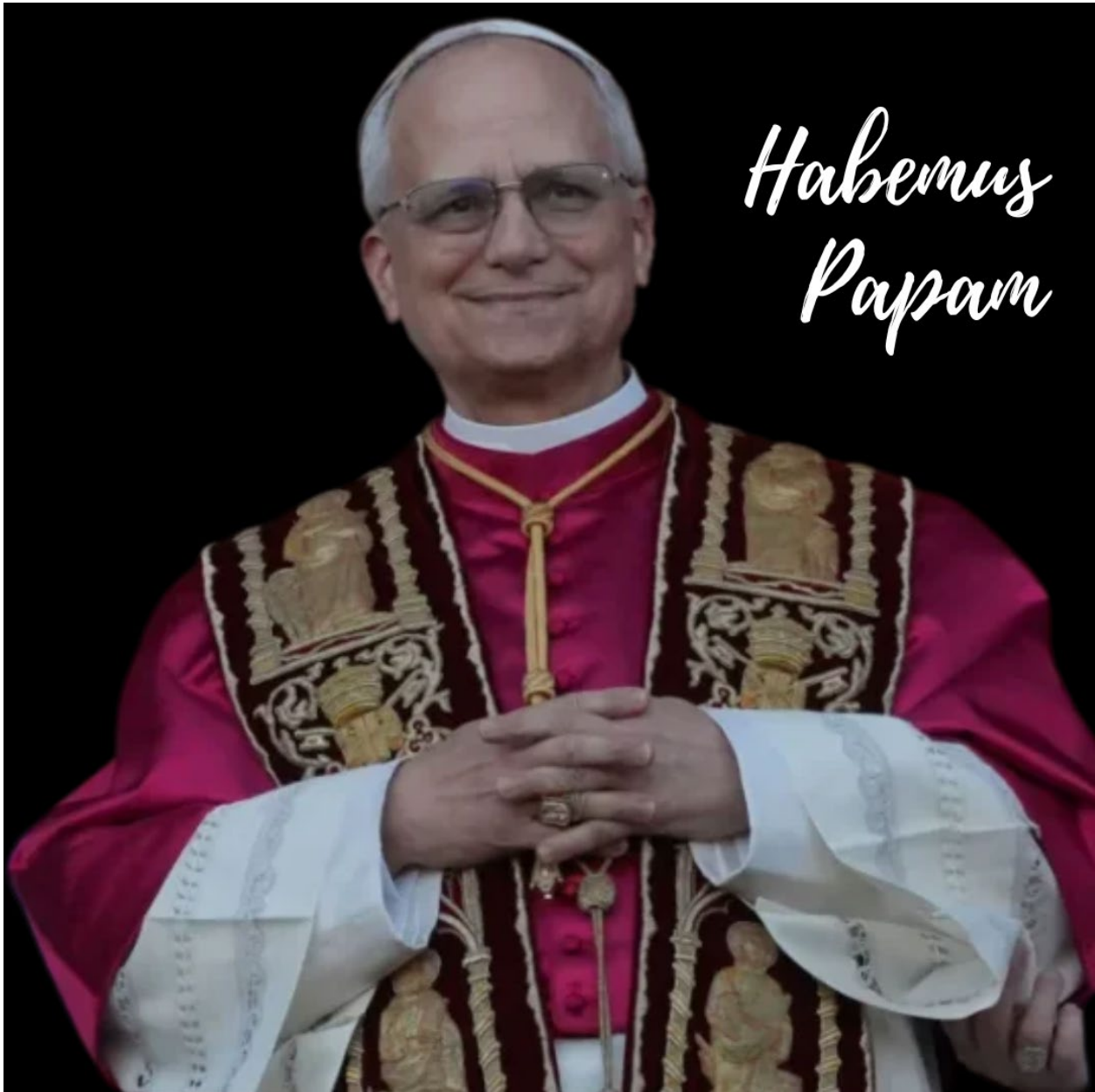


June – Habemus Papam

We have a Pope - The Importance of the Successor of Peter



The Pope is one of the most identifiable figures of the Catholic Church. In fact, recognition of the authority of the Bishop of Rome as the head of the Church on Earth is one of the definitive aspects of being Catholic.

Why is it that Catholics hold the Bishop of Rome in such high regard? Why is his role so important? Ultimately, the office of the Pope shows Christ continually shepherding his Church through Peter, the Rock upon whom He built the Church. It is a role that is entrusted with special authority and protection from certain errors.



The Keys to the Kingdom

In Catholic teaching, the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" given to Peter in Matthew 16:19 symbolize Christ granting him unique authority over the Church. This echoes Isaiah 22:22, where the key represents the power to govern in the king's name. Peter is thus appointed as the chief steward of Christ's household—the Church on earth. Not just Peter, but his successors too.

The keys signify both spiritual and juridical authority: spiritually, to preserve the faith and lead the Church; juridically, to make binding decisions on doctrine and discipline. The "power to bind and loose" includes the authority to teach, govern, and forgive sins.

Catholics believe this authority is passed on through apostolic succession to Peter's successors, the popes. The power of the keys refers to the governing of the Church. Through Peter and the papacy, Christ ensures unity, faithful leadership, and security for His people until the end of time.



The Rock

Jesus nicknamed Simon, son of John, *Kepha* or *Petros*, which we have translated Peter. This nickname means "rock" and Jesus gave him this name very early in their relationship. Simon may have been dependable or rough or particularly strong; we don't know which qualities led to the nickname. Later in His ministry, Jesus would provide foundational meaning to the name when He tells Peter in Matthew 16:18 Jesus tells Peter that he is the Rock upon which the Church will be built.

Although not done originally, by the 6th century, Popes began taking on a new name too. This was done for various reasons in the past, but in the last century it has been done to signify the ministry of the new Pope. Leo chose the name held by thirteen predecessors, the most recent of whom sought peace in the world during the rise of the working class, and the tensions that laid the foundations for World War I.



Succession

The apostles passed on their authority by the laying on of hands to the *episkopos* or "overseer" or "bishop" of a local Church. When St. Peter died with St. Paul at Rome, prior to death Peter passed on his authority to St. Linus, and he to St. Anacletus, and he to St. Clement I and on and on until most recently the authority was passed to Leo XIV. This may have been done by the pope himself before his death, or afterward by a council (see Acts 1:15-26).

The authority of the Chair of Peter was passed to Leo by the College of Cardinals rather than by the previous pope, Francis. This is done to ensure that the selection of the Pope is not influenced by worldly intentions. In centuries past, secular leaders had involvement and influence in the selection of the Pope, and this created problems (at one point there were three Popes at once). Since the 16th century the selection has resided solely with the College of Cardinals from whom the new Pope is selected in secret, without outside influence. Through this The Church can trace back the succession of all 266 popes who have shepherded the Church back to the Rock, St. Peter, and thereby to the Cornerstone, Christ, who gave him that authority.