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Pope Francis greets retired Pope Benedict XVI at the retired pontiff's Vatican residence Dec. 23, 2013. (OSV News/Vatican Media)



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Pope Francis voted for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, in the 2005 conclave that followed the death of St. John Paul II.

"He was the only one who could be pope at that time," Francis said about his immediate predecessor in an excerpt from the upcoming book "El Sucesor" ("The Successor"). The excerpt was published March 31 by the Spanish daily newspaper ABC.

Francis told Spanish journalist Javier Martínez-Brocal that he voted for Ratzinger in the 2005 conclave because after the "dynamic, very active pontificate" of St. John Paul II, "a pope was needed that would maintain a healthy balance, a transitional pope."

"El Sucesor" is a book-length interview with Martínez-Brocal focused on Francis' relationship with Benedict. Discussing the conclave that he participated in as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires and which elected his predecessor, Francis said he was "used" by other cardinals attempting to block Cardinal Ratzinger's election to the papacy. He was widely reported to have come out second on the final ballot.

Pope Francis said that a group of cardinals deployed a "full-fledged maneuver" by putting forward his name "to block Ratzinger's election and then negotiate for a different, third candidate." He said he had received 40 of the 115 votes from among the cardinal-electors in the Sistine Chapel — "enough to stop the candidacy of

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, because if they would have kept voting for me he would not have been able to reach the two-thirds needed to be elected pope."

"They still did not agree on who, but they were on the verge of throwing out a name," he said.

Once he learned of the strategy after the second or third ballot cast in the April 18-19 conclave, Pope Francis said he told Colombian Cardinal Darío Castrillón Hoyos to not "joke with my candidacy" and that he would not accept being pope if he were elected. "And from there Benedict was elected," he said.

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Francis said the group of cardinals who had put him up for election later told him they did not want a "foreign" pope. Although he did not explain what the comment meant, the term "foreign" was used in media reports after the 1978 election of St. John Paul II, the first non-Italian pope since 1523. Although Francis was born and raised in Argentina he is ethnically Italian.

Francis said that Ratzinger "was my candidate" in the conclave and that he came out of the conclave feeling pleased.

"If they had elected someone like me, who makes a big mess, he would not have been able to do anything," he said. "Benedict XVI was a man who went with the new style, and it wasn't easy for him. He found a lot of resistance inside the Vatican."

Asked what he thought the Holy Spirit was saying to the Catholic Church through the election of Benedict, the pope said the Spirit was saying, "Here I am in charge. There is no room for maneuvering."

In the book excerpt, Francis prefaces his response to the journalist's questions about the 2005 election by explaining that while cardinals are sworn not to reveal what happens in a conclave, "popes are allowed to tell."

The book is scheduled to be released in Spanish April 3; no publication date for an English-language translation for the book has yet been announced.