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The sun sets on a quiet St. Peter's Square on May 3, 2025. The seat of St. Peter is vacant, but is expected to be filled this week. (NCR photo/James V. Grimaldi)



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Rome — May 4, 2025
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Several cardinals who will join the conclave to elect the next pope said Masses on May 4 in their titular churches, the parishes assigned to them as an honor for becoming a prince of the church in the College of Cardinals.

There were no general congregations, the meetings among cardinals to discuss issues and concerns of the church and the qualities needed in the next pope. Some cardinals were stopped by journalists asking about the controversial post about the church that appeared on U.S. President Donald Trump's official social media accounts.

For the second Sunday in a row, and also the second Easter Sunday, the balcony from where the pope prays the traditional Angelus remained empty. An unusual quiet blanketed the streets of Rome. The deviation from custom, the lack of a papal appearance meant fewer of the usual crowds of faithful and tourists, leaving the cobbled piazzas and Via della Conciliazione almost empty.

Typically a magnet for thousands during Eastertide, the absence of the Angelus created a tranquil atmosphere throughout the Vatican and central Rome, including outside the Basilica of St. John and the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York speaks with parishioners after he celebrated Mass at

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York speaks with parishioners at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church n Rome, May 4, 2025. (CNS/Carol Glatz)

Some vendors shuttered their stalls early, security presence was minimal, and the typical noise of voices and footsteps was replaced by the echo of a few passing cars and scooters.

Cardinals were expected to be gathering quietly among themselves, in small groups, coffees, meals and in salons, comparing notes on who they think should be the next pope. The conclave is set to begin May 7.

On the way into his titular church, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, archbishop of Newark, New Jersey, and a top American contender for pope, would not discuss an image of Trump wearing papal regalia that was posted on the White House X account. "It's not worth commenting on," he told the National Catholic Reporter.

As New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan entered Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Roman church assigned to him by Pope Benedict XVI, a reporter asked the archbishop of New York if he was offended by Trump's tweets. "It was not good," he said.

Many of the cardinals did not go to their titular churches and instead attended the Mass for the final, ninth day of official mourning for Francis in St. Peter's Basilica at 5 p.m. Rome time. On Saturday, May 3, Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, a Salesian, celebrated the eighth of nine Masses for the late pope at St. Peter's Basilica.

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Praying for the dead is an act of love, said Artime, the former prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

"That is what we are doing now for Pope Francis, gathered as the people of God, together with the pastors and especially this evening with a very significant presence of consecrated men and women," he said.

Francis "was asking us to have a heart and a spirit pure and free enough to recognize the women and men of today, our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest, the last, the discarded, because in them is the Lord."

Some like Ukrainian Yona Tukuser have still been flocking to the square hoping that its next occupant will continue Francis' work.

Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime, pro-prefect of the dicastery for religious under Pope Francis

Cardinal Ángel Fernández Artime gives a homily at St. Peter’s Basilica on May 3, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Tukuser has been taking to the outskirts of St. Peter's Square to keep alive sentiments the late pontiff had expressed in his last testament.

"Hope for peace," Tukuser, an artist, had scribbled with her lipstick on a sheet of mustard colored paper that Italian restaurants use to serve fried food. She has been holding it up, facing St. Peter's.

It's a form of prayer, she said of the sign. As thousands have walked past, some have repeated the words when they see them, she said.

The pope said he had two wishes, she recalled: to be buried at Santa Maria Maggiore and to offer the suffering at the end of his life for peace in the world. With him gone, she's afraid of what will happen when the only major world leader who constantly called for peace has died.

"I feel like we lost the strongest voice of peace," she said.

Meanwhile, near Casa Santa Marta, where the cardinals will stay during the conclave, a journalist shouted out to Cardinal Francis Leo of Toronto that he was praying for him. "Pray a lot," Leo said, "because a little isn't enough."



Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, N.J., and his secretary, Fr. Anthony Palombo, walk from the subway stop to Mass at Santa Maria delle Grazie, the cardinal's titular church in Rome, May 4, 2025. (CNS/Cindy Wooden)

Camillo Barone and Olivia Bardo contributed to this story.

This story appears in the **Who will be the next pope?** and **The Legacy of Pope Francis** feature series.