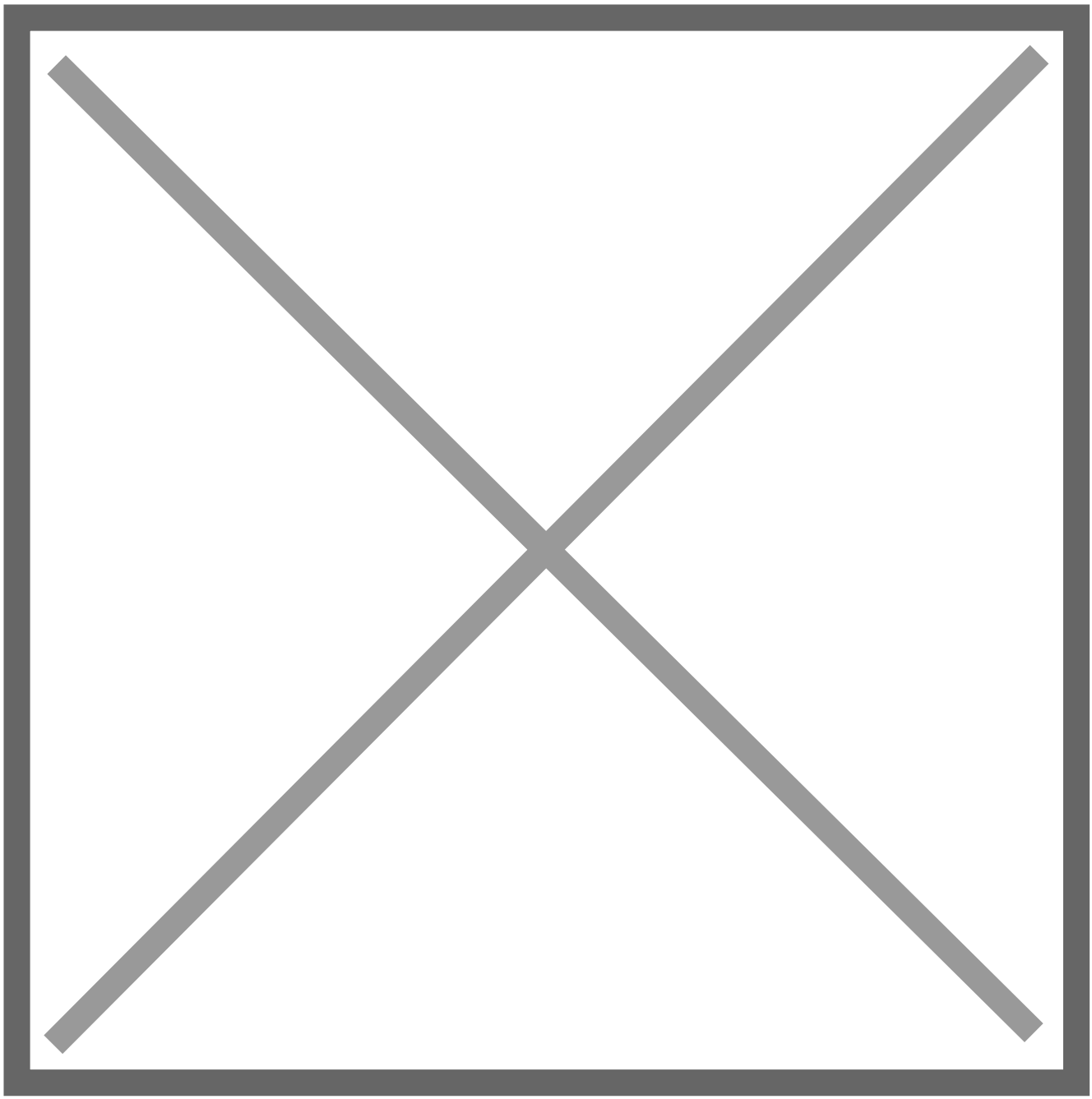
Culture



Italian figure skater Daniel Grassl performs during the Men's Single Skating short program during the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics at Milano Ice Skating Arena in Milan, Italy, Feb. 10, 2026. Grassl, fresh off a bronze medal in the team event and well-positioned in fourth place after the short program, told OSV News this week that the program was initially born out of an appreciation of the soundtrack from the 2024 Academy Award-winning film *Conclave*. (OSV News/Reuters/Amanda Perobelli)

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"The pope is dead."

These words will dramatically ring out across Olympic ice as Italian figure skater Daniel Grassl begins his long program to music from the movie *Conclave* in the men's figure skating final event Feb. 13, which will determine who stands on the podium at the Milan Cortina Games.

Grassl, fresh off a bronze medal in the team event and well-positioned in fourth place after the short program Feb. 10, told OSV News that the program was initially born out of an appreciation of the 2025 Academy Award-winning film's soundtrack.

At his coach's prompting, Grassl listened to the music by Volker Bertelmann, and he "immediately loved it" because it was "dark" but also had "so much joy."

After Grassl and his coach selected the music, "coincidentally, the pope died," he said, referring to Pope Francis' April 21, 2025, death, which was followed by the conclave that elected Pope Leo XIV.

While an actual conclave heightened the meaning of Grassl's musical selection, "we wanted to create also something more Italian" with his ice skating program, said Grassl, who grew up near Cortina in Merano, Italy, and who took seventh at the 2022 Beijing Olympics.

"I grew up in a Catholic family," he said, "and so when we started to create the program, we wanted to have really also some movements that remember the Church."

"It was very complicated and difficult to create something so deep," he said, "but I think in the end, it was a good story because I really tried to do the story of the Church and of the pope."

He said he has seen the *Conclave* movie "just one time" and found the ending "shocking."

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Grassl, 23, skates in a black shirt and trousers with a red sash. The dramatic climax of his program comes when he opens the placket of his top to reveal an underlayer of papal white and gold. He said the costume change was not part of the original plan for the program, but came out of a desire to recreate the moment of a papal election.

Asked if Leo might see the program, Grassl replied, "That would be my dream."

"If I could once go to him and meet him" that would also be a "really nice dream," he added.

He quipped that the men's final event was "still not sold out" if Leo wanted to attend.

Grassl added that skating his short program for the team event on home ice was meaningful, with some of his family in the stands. His sister attended. However, while his parents are in Milan, they did not attend because "they feel too much pressure when they watch but it was nice to have them there" and they were able to celebrate the results with him after the event, he said.

He said he looks forward to doing the *Conclave* program on Olympic ice in Milan and that it will be "really unique."

"I think the Italians are really going to appreciate it because it's a really deep theme and also really important to us," he said.

Grassl has faith that with the "Italian atmosphere" he can skate the best version of his program yet.