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Say hello to Africa's next great hope to be pope

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For the better part of three decades, the phrase "African pope" almost automatically beckoned images of Cardinal Francis Arinze, a smiling, charismatic Nigerian who loomed in the popular imagination as the best prospect to become the first African pope since Gelasius I in the late fifth century, and only the third African pope in history.

Arinze, however, is now retired and will turn 77 on Nov. 1. With the opening today of the second Synod for Africa, the torch has in effect been passed to Africa's next great *papabile*, or candidate to become pope: Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, who will celebrate his 61st birthday on Oct. 11.

Asked this morning during a Vatican news conference if the Catholic church is ready for a black pope, Turkson answered simply: "Why not?"

"We've had Kofi Annan as Secretary General of the United Nations ... he had his problems, but he did it. Now we have Obama in the United States. So, if by divine providence, God would wish to have a black man as pope, I say thanks be to God!"

It was vintage Turkson -- candid, charming, and delivered with a healthy dose of humor.

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