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O'Malley tops charts for Italian readers

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If the readers of Italy?s paper of record, *Corriere della Sera*, had any say in the matter, the choice for the next pope would be clear: Cardinal Sean O?Malley of Boston.

Corriere today asked eight contributors, including their own Vatican beat writers as well as noted Vatican-watchers, to name their top three picks to be the next pope. O?Malley was mentioned by five of those eight experts, putting him in a tie with Odilo Pedro Scherer of Brazil, and just one mention ahead of Angelo Scola of Milan.

Two other Americans, Timothy Dolan of New York and Donald Wuerl of Washington, got one mention apiece.

Where O?Malley really separated himself from the pack was in an on-line readers? poll on the *Corriere* web site. There O?Malley drew 36.7 percent of the vote, as of roughly 6:30 this evening Rome time. The Boston prelate far outpaced Scola with 17.9 percent and Luis Antonio Tagle of the Philippines with 14.3 percent.

What?s the appeal?

First of all, O?Malley is a Capuchin Franciscan, and the Franciscans are wildly popular in Italy. They?re considered the closest religious order to the poor and to ordinary people, the guys you can rely upon when the chips are down. They?re also considered the polar opposite of the usual clerical stereotypes ? not haughty or imperial, but simple, honest, and utterly unpolitical.

Second, the brief profile offered by *Corriere della Sera* to help voters make up their minds describes him as ?one of the principal exponents of the policy against sexual abuse in the Catholic church.? At a time when the Vatican once again finds itself fighting off criticism related to the abuse scandals, that reputation looks pretty good.

Third, the O?Malley profile also notes that he criticized Italian Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, for once calling the criticisms voiced by victims of abuse ?petty gossip.?

For Italians, Sodano incarnates the Vatican?s old guard. Italians are in an anti-establishment mood at the moment, having recently awarded 25 percent of their votes in national elections to a former comic named Beppo Grillo who ran on a ?rage against the machine? platform.

In that context, to see a Capuchin outsider taking on the powers that be in the church can?t help but stir hearts and minds.

Of course, neither the readers of *Corriere della Sera*, nor the paper?s panel of experts, will be in the Sistine Chapel when the real balloting takes place. If you?re looking for a symbolic expression of what many people

here seem to want in the next pope, however, you?re probably not going to do any better than O?Malley.

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