

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

March 12, 2013 at 2:00am

A Mass and readings for a new era with a new pope

by Pat Marrin

NCR Today

Conclave 2013

NCR's sister publication, Celebration, is home to Pencil Preaching, a blog written by Celebration editor Pat Marrin that combines Scripture and sketches to reflect on the Word. Marrin wrote a reflection on the readings the cardinals heard at a Tuesday Mass before they headed into conclave.

"The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me ... to announce a year of favor from the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3).

The notion of a pencil sketch is a fitting approach to an event that has not happened yet for which the basic lines are already drawn. The 115 cardinals who will retire to the Sistine Chapel on Tuesday to select the next pope already represent the trajectory of the Catholic church into the future. What will be is already being sketched out in their thoughts and concerns for church and world.

Secrecy pervades the process, its liturgical character and historical rituals designed to suggest divine guidance. Agendas will enter the conclave, but the discernment is unscripted, a labor of conscience unfolding against the backdrop of Michelangelo's "Last Judgment." If any voice dominates, it will be scriptural passages chosen for the last Mass celebrated by the cardinals before they enter the conclave.

Any enterprising reporter who wants a glimpse into the minds of the electors would be well to consider the readings they will ponder as they select the next Vicar of Christ.

Imagine you are in the conclave and these words from Isaiah are echoing in your mind: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me, sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the

Mass to Elect the Pope

Isaiah 61:1-3a, 6a, 8b-9

Psalms 88

Ephesians 4:11-16

John 15:9-17

broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives." Or from Ephesians: "We are no longer to be children tossed by waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching; so let us speak the truth in love, so shall we fully grow up into Christ." Or from the Gospel of John: "This is my commandment; love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, that a person should lay down his life for his friends."

The sign that the Word has spoken will be a wisp of white smoke from the famous chimney on the roof of the Sistine Chapel. But for this election to have its effect, we all must be formed by the same Word -- Verbum Dei -- the very foundation of the church, made flesh in us, the body of Christ, for the sake of the world.

[Pencil Preaching is a column by *Celebration* editor Pat Marrin. Pencil Preaching can be found here.]

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