Selection of the next Pope

Yesterday’s morning paper carried a story about the cardinals assembled in Rome for the conclave. They had all gone out to their titular churches to celebrate Sunday Mass. (As I understand the history, the cardinals were originally the pastors of the churches in Rome; thus all new cardinals are assigned a titular church in Rome as their cardinal see, so to speak.) Early this morning we heard the conclave began to select the next Pope.

Anyway, it got me to thinking about this rather momentous occasion, not just for the Catholic Church but for all world religions. Just as the Dalai Lama is a world symbol, so too is the Pope. The next pope can and will exert an important influence on international sentiments and relations. It’s wonderful that many of the world’s cultures will be present in the voting process – perhaps not equally, but at least with equal individual voices. These voices will carry an important message for the Church in the Modern World. Vatican II set the church squarely in the middle of this somewhat wild and messy cultural mélange we call our church today, asking that we be a sign of loving care and community for all people.

We Catholics believe that Christ promised to be with the church until the end of time, and sent the Holy Spirit to remind us of the centrality of Christ among us and to guide the church through the many cultural and historical shifts that it would encounter. It will be good to pray these days that the conclave listen deeply to the movements of the Spirit within. One thing we know in advance is that the next pope will not meet everyone’s hopes and expectations. Let us pray, though, that he will bring an appreciation for the richness of the wide variety of cultures that make up our beautiful but struggling world.