

We need a pope who knows how to smile

Isabella R. Moyer | Feb. 18, 2013 NCR Today

Thoughtful and insightful commentaries are circling the globe assessing the qualities of possible papal contenders. With each conclave, the list of preferred attributes grows. The pope is expected to be a theologian and a pastor; multilingual; a good orator; and an effective administrator. His resume would ideally include broad experience internationally and within the halls of the Vatican. And in our age of media and public relations, charisma is a must.

Like it or not, the pope is seen as the face of the Catholic church. His is the face that will be plastered on newspapers around the world. His is the face that will make papal pronouncements, address the faithful, and preside at grand liturgies for thousands. His is the face we will see framed and hanging in church foyers, school halls and living room walls. Please, God, give us a pope that knows how to smile!

A papal conclave is not a beauty pageant, but it would be nice if congeniality was taken into consideration. Blessed John XXIII apparently pondered: If God wanted him to be pope, why didn't God make him more photogenic? And yet, his warmth and good humor is what made him as beloved as he was. Much has been written about Pope John Paul I being the "smiling pope," and it's true. His wasn't the over-the-top grin associated with extroverts who have to be the center of attention. His was a sparkling smile, reflected in eyes that exuded a genuine warmth and kindness.

Joy-filled holiness radiates more warmth and draws more souls than dour-faced, pietistic bearers of doom and gloom. Mean-looking men draped in heavy Baroque finery who distance themselves from the great unwashed in the pews while flinging condemnations at them don't reflect a church ready to welcome all seekers with open arms.

The *Lineamenta* [1] for the Synod of Bishops on new evangelization stressed that the good news must be spread by evangelizers "whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world." Faith grounded in joy is contagious. Joy does not trivialize or white-wash the message, but presents the message as hope-filled and life-giving, not as an overbearing burden laden with guilt. It's not called "good news" for nothing.

We can spend hours analyzing the latest betting odds on the papal contenders or reading the curricula vitae of the front-runners. I propose that we add a quick [Google image search](#) [2] to the names being bandied about. They all have solid credentials, but who has that look of a true people's pope, a look that radiates an inner peace in the midst of the responsibilities of his office? Who has a face -- and a smile -- that will reflect the joy of our faith around the world?

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Links:

[1] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20110202_lineamenta-xiii-assembly_en.html

[2] <http://images.google.com/>