Blowing Smoke

The Catholic Church is in the process of electing a new pope as these words are penned. The world is waiting for white smoke to arise from the copper chimney at the Vatican indicating that a new pope has been chosen. By the time you read this article, all will be decided.

What is remarkable to watch, as the conclave proceeds, is that the world is fascinated with this. Even television networks known for their secular and anti-Christian content are promising to deliver the news the moment the decision is made within the walls of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Italy.

It is hard to believe that a few years ago, I, along with other pilgrims, stood in the Sistine Chapel to worship and to view the marvelous paintings in that room. To see the ceiling paintings of Michelangelo, created between the years 1508-1512, was a breathtaking moment of faith. To see the "Creation of Adam", where God’s hand reached out of heaven and touched his, thereby ours, was a wonderful experience.

Michelangelo also painted “The Last Judgment” in front of which the 115 cardinals took their vows of secrecy before the huge wooden doors to the chapel were closed. The next time they will be opened is when the new pope is announced.

We are all descendants of this same church. For fifteen hundred years, there was one church, which became the Catholic church.

Peter, the impetuous apostle, was the first pope. His bones are interred in St. Peter’s church which is a part of the Vatican complex in Rome.

Then, we decided we wanted to go another way, and the Protestant church was birthed. Battles for legitimacy are still going on.

Some churches think they have begun out of thin air. But we all share a common history and are still a part of the same family.

The Catholic Church is deciding whether they want a strong defender of the faith or a visionary pastor who can bring the flock together. Christians and pagans alike look on with interest and many different opinions.

Perhaps the election of the new pope can give all Christians the chance to take their own faith seriously. Christ came to reconcile us to God, and to one another. Whenever either of those dynamics gets out of balance, we are in trouble.

I am glad that no matter what happens in time or space, that God is in charge. We must seek to find the God who redeems us and walks with us day by day. Whether Catholic or Protestant, all who believe in Jesus as Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is curious that the process to elect a new pope coincides with the approach of Easter this time. The news organizations are very interested in the process of election, taking pleasure in providing us intimate details of the balloting, trends, and in being the first to report a plume of white smoke rising to the sky.

We should take a deeper interest in the fact the God sent his son to die for us and that we will live forever because of that act of grace prompted by divine love. We must realize that church is not an option but a privilege, a gift from God which makes us able to draw closer to him and to help others in Jesus’ name.

God lives in the Sistine Chapel, yes. But he also lives in every church where his faithful gather for prayer and worship. He lives in your church as well.

Whether God sits on the back row or is in a place of honor in our worship and work, that's really up to us. He will not force his way in.
He stands at the door and knocks. Whether the location is the huge folding doors of the Sistine Chapel, the doors of our local church or the door of our heart, he wants to come in. He waits to be a part of the process.

And when he is, glory will come forth. When we are faithful to him, God will bless us in ways we can never imagine.

Churches and Christians all over the world are blowing smoke, going through the motions rather than knowing the living, empowering, saving God they were founded to serve. When we realize that we are blowing smoke to cover our own inadequacies and shortcomings and give our hearts and mission to the God, great things will happen.

We blow smoke to cover up what we can’t do or don’t know. The days of blowing smoke must end. We are called to be like the people of Israel in the desert right after slavery, following the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night. Hearing God, being inspired by God, led by God on a daily basis.

We must be a part of miracles which cause people to say “Holy Smoke!” and be amazed that God has spoken or acted through his believers yet again.