



INTRODUCTION: A calling, an election... and a new name

In a world where every detail is scrutinized and every decision analyzed under a magnifying glass, there remains a gesture within the Church that still carries an aura of mystery, spiritual depth, and prophetic beauty: **the change of name by a newly elected Pope.**

It’s not a formality. It’s not ecclesiastical branding. Above all, it is **a proclamation of mission, identity, and apostolic continuity.** It echoes a sacred history that speaks of radical transformations, extraordinary vocations, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the souls chosen to shepherd Christ’s Church.

This article aims to unpack the origin, the meaning, the theological weight, and the pastoral teachings of this seemingly simple act, rich in significance. We will explore it through Scripture, Tradition, history, and the Church’s pastoral life today.

1. Biblical foundations: when God changes a name, He changes a destiny

From the very first pages of the Bible, we see that when God changes a person’s name, **He does not do it capriciously, but to signify an interior transformation and a new divine mission.**

- **Abram** becomes **Abraham**, “father of multitudes” (Gen 17:5), when God promises him countless descendants and an everlasting covenant.
- **Sarai** becomes **Sarah**, “princess,” the mother of nations.
- **Jacob**, the deceiver, becomes **Israel**, “he who struggles with God” (Gen 32:29), after wrestling with the angel.

But the clearest and most luminous example is found in the New Testament, in the person of **Simon**, whose name Jesus changes:

“*You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church*” (Mt 16:18).

Here, there is not just a new name, but a **foundational apostolic mission.** Jesus makes



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Simon a firm rock, the stone upon which He will build His Church. Just as Peter received a new name to embody a new mission, **every Pope who succeeds him shares in that same spirit.**

2. A gesture born of humility: the case of Mercurius

The first Pope to change his name did so for a profound reason. His name was **Mercurius**—yes, like the Roman god of commerce and messages.

When he was elected Supreme Pontiff in the 6th century (in the year 533), this man understood that **he could not be the head of the Church bearing the name of a pagan deity**, and he chose a new name: **John II**. In doing so, he inaugurated a tradition that would, over the centuries, become custom.

This act was one of **spiritual courage and remarkable humility**. Mercurius renounced his public identity to be clothed in a new one, more fitting to his sacred mission. It wasn’t about appearance or popularity: it was an act of faith.

That change marked a turning point. Since then, most Popes have chosen a new name upon their election, and each of those names carries a story, an intention, and a pastoral orientation.

3. What does a new name express? A program for a pontificate

When a Pope chooses a name, **he is sending a clear message**. It’s as if he were saying to the world: “This is how I want to be understood. This is what I want to emphasize. This is my model.”

A few famous examples:

- **John Paul I** (1978) combined the names of his two immediate predecessors, **John XXIII** and **Paul VI**, indicating his desire to continue the balanced legacy of the Second Vatican Council.
- **John Paul II** continued that line and, with his long pontificate, deepened the defense of life, human dignity, and global evangelization.



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- **Benedict XVI** chose his name for Saint Benedict of Nursia, patron of Europe, and for Pope Benedict XV, a peacemaker during World War I. His pontificate was marked by reason illuminated by faith, liturgical beauty, and defense of Christianity in Europe.
- **Francis** chose the name of the Poverello of Assisi, sending a clear message of poverty, simplicity, dialogue, and care for creation.

Each choice is a **living prophecy**. A Pope, in choosing his name, is declaring: “I want to be like this saint, like this previous Pope, like this servant of the Gospel.” It’s a theological, spiritual, and pastoral gesture all at once.

4. Theological implications: a new identity in Christ

From a theological point of view, the name change is not merely symbolic: **it is sacramental in that it reflects an interior change worked by the Holy Spirit.**

Let us remember that the Conclave is not merely a human election. It is **a divine election mediated by men**. The cardinals vote, yes, but it is the Holy Spirit who guides. Therefore, the moment the Pope accepts his election and changes his name is **a second calling**. He is no longer just a priest, a bishop, or a cardinal: he is **the successor of Peter**.

That new name, then, **seals a spiritual and pastoral transformation**. He no longer acts in his own name, but as the visible representative of Christ on Earth.

This carries deep implications:

- The Pope **no longer belongs to himself**.
 - He chooses a name that expresses his self-offering.
 - His name becomes **a banner for millions** of faithful who look to him as shepherd and father.
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5. Practical applications: What does this mean for me?

You are not the Pope. But **you, too, have received a new name**.

- In Baptism, you were called by your name, but you were also sealed with the name of Christ.



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- In Confirmation, you reaffirmed your identity, and many take the name of a patron saint.
- In religious life, it is sometimes customary to receive a new name.
- In Heaven, according to Revelation 2:17, we are promised **a white stone with a new name that only God and the one who receives it will know.**

*“To the one who conquers I will give the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it”
(Rev 2:17).*

This “new name” symbolizes **our identity redeemed in Christ**, our unique vocation, the singular work that God wants to accomplish in each of us.

So, when we contemplate the Pope’s gesture of changing his name, we should ask ourselves:

- Am I truly living as one who has been **called by God**?
- What is the **mission** Christ entrusts to me today?
- What new name does Jesus want to give me in this stage of life?

6. Theological-pastoral practical guide: Embracing your new name in Christ

1. **Acknowledge your baptismal vocation**

Recall your Baptism. Do you know the exact date? Do you know the meaning of your name? Which saint walks with you? To live from your Baptism is to live as “another Christ,” anointed and sent.

2. **Pray with your patron saint and ask for spiritual identity**

Your patron saint is not decorative. They are your guide, your mirror, and your intercessor. Talk to them. Get to know them. Imitate their virtues.

3. **Discern if Christ wants to “rename” something in you**

Are you Peter or still Simon? Are you Abraham or clinging to being Abram? Sometimes the Lord wants us to leave behind an old way of being to embrace a new mission.

4. **Change your goals, not just your labels**



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Changing your name isn’t about branding; it’s about heart transformation. Let Christ change you from within.

5. **Embrace your mission with joy and courage**

If Christ has chosen you, He will also give you the grace. Don’t look at your weaknesses: look at the new name He gives you—and follow Him.

CONCLUSION: A new name, a living Church

Each time a Pope changes his name, **he reminds us that the Church is not a static structure, but a living reality guided by the Spirit**. He reminds us that **vocation is dynamic**, that the Gospel transforms, and that **God continues to work today as He did yesterday**—calling His own by name and giving them a new one.

Just as Simon became Peter, and Mercurius became John, **you and I are called to move from the old to the new**, from the natural man to the spiritual man, from our own will to God’s will.

Because in the end, what matters is not the name we give ourselves, but **the name God has prepared for us**.

Are you willing to let Him reveal it to you?