



A spiritual guide inspired by the life of the humble hermit who changed the course of Church history through radical obedience to God

Introduction: A Pope Who Didn't Want to Be Pope

In a world where power, visibility, and recognition seem to be the measure of success, the figure of Celestine V shines with a different light—almost scandalous in its purity. A man who lived in a cave as a hermit was elected Pope... and then resigned. What can this seemingly legendary story tell us today? How can such a radical gesture speak to us in an age where spirituality is often buried beneath noise and haste?

This article is an invitation to walk in the footsteps of Pietro del Morrone—better known as Celestine V—the man who preferred a cave to a throne, prayer to power, silence to crowds. Let us discover his story, its deep theological relevance, and what we can learn from his life to nourish our own.

I. A Man Hidden in God: Who Was Celestine V?

From Young Monk to Hermit High in the Mountains

Born around the year 1215 in Isernia, in the Kingdom of Naples, Pietro del Morrone was the eleventh child of a peasant family. From an early age, he felt a profound attraction to a life of penance and solitude. He entered the Benedictine order but soon chose to live as a hermit in the Abruzzi mountains. There, in an almost inaccessible cave on Mount Morrone, he dedicated himself to prayer, fasting, and contemplation.

His reputation for holiness spread throughout the region, and many came to seek his spiritual counsel. He founded a monastic congregation inspired by strict Benedictine observance: the Celestines.

The Longest Conclave in History

After the death of Pope Nicholas IV in 1292, the conclave reached a stalemate. For more than two years, the cardinals were unable to elect a successor due to political tensions and



internal conflicts. It was then that Pietro del Morrone, from his cave, sent a letter to the College of Cardinals urging them to make a prompt decision for the good of the Church. That prophetic letter was interpreted as a divine inspiration... and in a stunning turn of events, *he* was chosen as the new Pope!

Searching for the Pope in a Cave

A procession of bishops, clergy, nobles, and emissaries of the King of Naples climbed the mountain to find the hermit who had never dreamed of occupying the Chair of Peter. When they told him he had been elected Pope, Pietro wept. According to reports, he tried to flee, resisted with humility, but finally accepted as an act of obedience to God's will.

He was crowned in 1294 in L'Aquila, riding a donkey, with the same simplicity that marked his entire life. He took the name Celestine V.

II. A Resignation That Marked History

Only Five Months as Pope

Celestine V was not prepared for the political weight of the papacy. He quickly realized he was being used as a tool by forces outside the Gospel. His monastic sensitivity and life of prayer clashed with the corruption of the Roman Curia. Faced with this tension, and after consulting legal experts, he drafted a decree that would allow a Pope to resign. And he did.

On December 13, 1294—just five months after his election—he stepped down and returned to solitude. He was the first Pope in history to voluntarily resign. More than 700 years later, Benedict XVI would follow in his footsteps.

A Gesture Rich in Theology

Celestine V's resignation was not an act of weakness, but of spiritual discernment. He recognized that he was not the right man for the mission. Theologian Joseph Ratzinger, before becoming Pope, wrote that Celestine V taught the world that the greatness of the papacy does not lie in power, but in obedience to God.



“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
— 2 Corinthians 12:10

III. Spiritual and Theological Relevance

1. Silence as a Form of Resistance

In a society saturated with noise and over-information, the testimony of Celestine V is a cry of hope: silence can be fruitful. He reminds us that to hear God, we must quiet many inner and outer voices. Celestine chose a cave over a palace because he could pray there without distractions. Where is your cave today?

2. Obedience Over Ambition

His life challenges our notions of success. He did not seek power or fame. He teaches us that obedience to God may lead us down unexpected paths—even to the papacy... or back to the cave. But everything, absolutely everything, can be an occasion for holiness if lived in union with God’s will.

3. Renunciation as an Act of Love

Today’s culture runs from renunciation. But the life of Celestine V teaches us that some renunciations save. Renouncing control, vanity, or what does not edify can be a deeply Christian act.

IV. Practical Applications for Your Daily Life

How to Live Like Celestine V Today

1. **Create Your Own Inner Cave:** Seek daily moments of silence for prayer. Turn off your phone. Silence the world. You don’t need a mountain to be alone with God.
2. **Discern Your Missions:** Ask yourself each day if what you’re doing aligns with the



Gospel. Not everything that glitters is your vocation. Celestine accepted—and then renounced—when he realized it wasn't his calling.

3. **Embrace Humility:** The path to holiness passes through knowing that we are not indispensable. Celestine's humility teaches us that God works more through the small than the powerful.
 4. **Make Liberating Renunciations:** Fast from social media, from noise, from ego. Offer those renunciations as prayer. Live the Gospel of detachment.
 5. **Cultivate Spiritual Obedience:** Listen to God's voice in Scripture, in prayer, and in your conscience. Obey even when it's hard. Like Celestine did.
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V. Conclusion: Celestine, a Mirror of Evangelical Radicalism

Celestine V was a Pope who chose to be a servant. A man who said “yes” to God in the cave and “no” to power when he realized it was not his mission. His life is a living parable of the Gospel, a rebuke to worldly logic, and a burning call to authentic holiness.

Today more than ever, we need his witness. Not to abandon the world, but to live in it with a free, silent, obedient heart. To remember that there is no greater glory than to be hidden with Christ in God.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

— Matthew 6:33

And you? Are you ready to find your inner cave to hear God's voice?