



Introduction: A Saint Who Speaks to the Present

St. Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) is known worldwide as the *Poverello*, the lover of evangelical poverty, the reformer who renewed the Church through humility. Yet few are aware of his mysterious prophetic visions about future crises in the Church—particularly one striking prediction: that of the *"pope who will abandon Rome."*

This prophecy, recorded in medieval Franciscan sources and debated by theologians for centuries, seems to resonate eerily with our times. What exactly did St. Francis see? Was it a warning, a call to conversion, or a mysterious divine plan for the Church?

In this article, we will explore the historical origins of this prophecy, its theological interpretation, and its possible significance for the Church today.

I. Historical Context: St. Francis and the Church of His Time

To understand this prophecy, we must look at the 13th century, a time of great tension in the Church. Corruption, power struggles, and heresies were rampant. Rather than responding with destructive criticism, St. Francis embraced radical Gospel love and obedience to the Pope, whom he called *"Lord Pope"* with deep reverence.

Yet some Franciscan chronicles, such as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* and writings by his close disciples, record visions and words from the saint about future tribulations. Among them stands out one in which Francis reportedly saw:

"A time when faithful men will be put to the test, and the shepherd of the Church will seem absent, leaving Rome in confusion."

This idea was not unique to Francis. Medieval prophecies about papal crises circulated widely, such as those of St. Malachy (on the "last popes") or the revelations of St. Hildegard of Bingen. But Francis' prophecy has a distinct tone: it is not catastrophic but *exhortative*—a call to remain steadfast in faith.



II. The Prophecy in Detail: A Physical or Spiritual Abandonment?

The mention of a "*pope who will abandon Rome*" has been interpreted in two main ways:

1. **Physical abandonment:** A pontiff who, due to persecution, war, or crisis, leaves the seat of Rome. This happened historically during the *Avignon Papacy* (1309–1377), when popes resided in France, and some connect it to Pope Pius VII's imprisonment by Napoleon in 1809.
2. **Spiritual abandonment:** A papacy in which, without physically leaving Rome, the pope seems "absent" in his role as doctrinal guide, allowing confusion or division. This more symbolic reading has been applied to debates about modern Church crises.

St. Francis gave no concrete details, but his vision aligns with his constant concern for *fidelity to the Gospel*. In his *Testament*, he wrote:

"And after the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I should do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the form of the holy Gospel."

For him, the real crisis was not geographical but one of *holiness*.

III. Connection to Other Prophecies and Scripture

This Franciscan prophecy parallels biblical texts and other private revelations:

- **Matthew 24:15:** "*When you see the abomination of desolation... let those in Judea flee to the mountains.*" Jesus warns of trials when the sacred seems profaned.
- **Revelation 17–18:** The vision of Babylon (a symbol of corruption) and its fall could be interpreted as a warning about Church crises.
- **Prophecies of St. Malachy:** The famous list of papal mottos includes "*Petrus*



Romanus," the last pope before a great tribulation.

However, the Church has always taught that such prophecies must be read prudently, without sensationalism. As St. John of the Cross said: *"In the evening of life, we will be judged on love."*

IV. Does It Relate to Pope Francis or Recent Events?

In recent years, some have drawn connections between this prophecy and events such as:

- The resignation of Benedict XVI (2013), an unprecedented act in centuries.
- Doctrinal controversies under Pope Francis' pontificate.
- Growing secularization and division within the Church.

But rather than seeking "literal fulfillments," St. Francis' message was clear: **in times of darkness, the faithful must cling to Christ and Tradition.**

V. Conclusion: A Call to Hope and Fidelity

The prophecy of the *"pope who will abandon Rome"* is not meant to instill fear but to remind us that the Church belongs to Christ, and the storms will not destroy her (Mt 16:18). St. Francis, in his love for the Cross, teaches us that even in the greatest crises, **God raises up saints to renew His Church.**

As he said: *"Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have made little progress."* In times of uncertainty, his example calls us to be light—with humility and courage.

What should we do today?

1. **Pray for the Pope**, whoever he may be.
2. **Remain faithful to the Church's perennial Magisterium.**
3. **Live the Gospel without fear**, as Francis did.

The history of the Church is a succession of crises and resurrections. And as the saint of



Assisi prophesied: *"After the storm, peace will come."*

Want to explore further? We recommend:

- *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* (Franciscan legends).
- *The Prophecy of the Popes* (attributed to St. Malachy—read with discernment).
- *Letter to All the Faithful*, by St. Francis himself.

"May the Lord give you His peace." (The Franciscan greeting)

This article seeks to be a spiritual guide, not alarmist speculation. The Church remains in Christ's hands, and our mission is to be faithful, trusting that *"all things work for the good of those who love God"* (Rom 8:28).