JEREMY VINE:
No pope has taken early retirement since the 13th century, so Pope Benedict’s decision to abdicate took even the Vatican by surprise. In effect his resignation leaves one billion Catholics leaderless until a new pontiff is elected. Up to a hundred thousand people are expected to gather this morning in St. Peter’s Square for Benedict’s final Sunday blessing. So who will fill the Pope’s famous Prada shoes? Can his successor steer the Catholic Church at a time of division, scandal and continuing criticism from survivors of clerical abuse? I’m joined now by the former Archbishop of Westminster who led the Catholic Church in England and Wales for almost a decade, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor. Welcome to you.

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
Thank you.
JEREMY VINE:
So how does it work now? The final Sunday prayers and then that’s it?

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
Yes, well there’s a big audience on Wednesday in the square, which is a normal Wednesday audience so it will be a huge crowd then. And then he meets the cardinals on Thursday morning and I’m going out to join the other cardinals for that. And then …

JEREMY VINE:
You played a role in the conclave last time. You’ll be there advising this time.

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
That’s right. I don’t go in because I’m eighty and all eighty year olds don’t go in … yes. And so but he’s having his last meeting with the cardinals on the Thursday morning and then in the evening he takes a helicopter out to Castel Gandolfo where he’ll stay for the next month or two.

JEREMY VINE:
In terms of his legacy, he kept the church in position in a number of areas: contraception, gay marriage, abortion, married priests. Do you think time will show that that was a mistake?

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
No I don’t. I think the cardinals when they meet here over these next couple of weeks to discuss the qualities, they won’t be thinking about those issues. They will be thinking about what kind of man, what kind of pope do we want at this present time. And they’ll be thinking what cardinal has the spiritual qualities that are necessary, what cardinal has the kind of being able to be a bridge maker within the church and also looking at our very new world.

JEREMY VINE:
But I was looking at the figures for Irish Catholics yesterday. Eighty per cent attended mass once a week in the 80s; now it’s 35 per cent. So if you’re looking at building a
bridge to the world, you’d think some change was needed. You’d think …

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
Well I always like the word ‘development’. Things do develop. You’ve got to look at the world and the issues and challenges that face the church. But the main challenge is one of faith in a secular world and deepening the faith of the Catholic people, and the main thing for the Pope really is to give an example of how the members of the church can be strengthened in their faith in Jesus Christ.

JEREMY VINE:
Let me ask you about the doubts about some of the cardinals who’ll be voting. Today you will have seen the story about Cardinal Keith O’Brien.

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
Yes, I’ve just …

JEREMY VINE:
Allegations that he was …

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
Well …

JEREMY VINE:
… he made passes at male colleagues several years ago.

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
I was obviously very sad to hear that. The cardinal’s denied the allegations …

JEREMY VINE:
He has denied them, that’s right.

CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:
… so I think we’ll just have to see how that pans out. And yes there have been
other cases which have been a great scandal to the church over these past years and I think the church has to face up, has faced up to some of them very well indeed.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Just to give you another one. A cardinal who covered up child abuse by priests in America is insisting on attending the conclave and playing a role in choosing the next pope, Cardinal Sean Brady.

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well I think that one has got to take these things … Cardinal Brady, a friend of mine, I think he has tackled the question of child abuse as well as he can and it has been tackled in Ireland and I think people are becoming more reassured that the church in as it were dealing with this question is doing so in a transparent way. And we did this here in England and Wales when over ten years ago we set up the Nolan Inquiry that would have very strict guidelines of how you deal with allegations.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Well how will the church deal with the case of Cardinal Keith O’Brien, for example?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well I think the case of Cardinal Keith O’Brien - I don’t know, I think all this will be up to Cardinal Keith O’Brien himself. He has to decide …

**JEREMY VINE:**
*(over)* Will it?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
… in terms of whether … how he faces the allegations.

**JEREMY VINE:**
But what will the church … I mean he can’t investigate him… He’s the last person on earth who can investigate himself, so what will the church do there?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well I don’t know what the church will do. I think Cardinal O’Brien’s very near to retirement and I suspect that his resignation, which is already with the Pope (because he’s nearing 75 and every cardinal … every bishop has to retire) then presumably that will be accepted.

**JEREMY VINE:**
But the church could say with these serious allegations hanging over him, I’m sorry, we have to not allow you to play a part in choosing the next pope. Otherwise he’s there in the conclave and he’ll be doing it.

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well that’s up to Cardinal O’Brien to decide what he will do.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Up to him?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Yeah, it’ll be up to him. And I think rightly so. These allegations have not been proved in any way, so I think he will have to decide whether he goes or not.

**JEREMY VINE:**
But won’t people look at that answer (with great respect) and say that’s exactly the problem - that the Catholic Church tends to hide people when they get into this kind of situation?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well I don’t really think so because I think that nowadays there is a sense of transparency, and allegations made against a person - whatever they are, particularly with any kind of abuse - are examined clearly and honestly and appropriate action is taken. And that will be so with regard to Cardinal O’Brien, but we must listen first of all also to what he has to say.

**JEREMY VINE:**
The next pope will have the current pope living in a flat round the corner, which
might be tricky, but who … I won’t say who is your money on. *(The cardinal laughs)*
That’s the worst possible … Who do you want to get it?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well I’ve been looking at the papers. You’ve got you know is it going to be an African, a South American, an Asian or a European again? Quite frankly, I don’t know. Anybody could become Pope. I mean even somebody who’s not in the conclave.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Because they’re all quite a conservative bunch, the ones who are the runners and riders, aren’t they?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Yes.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Do you regret that? Do you want to hear some different voices in there, at least to show that they’re contenders?

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Well I think the cardinals know each other perhaps not as well as they should and that will be the task in the first ten days. And, yes, and people are putting money on, you know. I see the Daily Mirror had even me down as 150-1, so … *(Vine laughs)* So anyway, I think the fact of the matter is the cardinals are there to discuss together and before God make a very solemn decision. And when I was at the last conclave in 2005, going up to put one’s vote before the last judgement in the Sistine Chapel is very sombre, very dramatic, so I will be praying that those cardinals that go into the conclave will make the right decision.

**JEREMY VINE:**
Cardinal, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

**CARDINAL CORMAC MURPHY-O'CONNOR:**
Thank you.
JEREMY VINE:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS