
USA: today Joe Biden to be sworn in as 46th President for a more pluralistic society

At 12 p.m. local time, standing on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, Joe Biden will be sworn in as the 46th President of the United States. He will swear his oath of office on a 5-inch-thick family Bible, its cover consumed, he will do so as a Catholic, like only John F. Kennedy did before him. He will first attend a prayer service at St Matthew's Cathedral, where he invited also some of his political opponents. Senate Majority Leader, Republican Mitch McConnell, along with House Republican Minority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, who voted against certifying Biden's victory, will sit among some 400 guests. Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Christians of various denominations and co-workers with no particular religious affiliation will usher in the Biden era under the banner of faith. *The process of reconciliation and healing of the country also needs these gestures, which in times of pandemic extend beyond formalities to reach out to America's frailties and distress, crippled by the virus and torn apart by an unprecedented attack on its democratic institutions, betrayed by a president who incited an insurrection and who announced that today, disregarding a 150-year long tradition, he will not attend the inauguration of his successor, leaving the White House as a fugitive, early in the morning, without a farewell speech and with a farewell event that many invited guests have refused to attend.* Last night, President-elect Joe Biden outlined the path of his leadership on the empty esplanade of the Lincoln Memorial. Almost alone, facing 20,000 American flags and 400 lanterns, accompanied by his wife Jill, Vice-President Kamala Harris and her husband, and a Michigan nurse at the forefront of the battle against Covid, as dusk was setting in, Biden said, "We shine the lights into the darkness", with footage of the empty space being more powerful than words. "To heal, we must remember. It's hard sometimes, to remember, but that's how we heal. It's important to do that as a nation, that's why we're here today." The man who delivered this statement experienced the struggle of this journey and the grief of painful loss: his first wife, a daughter and a son died in tragic circumstances. The COVID-19 memorial to honour the victims followed a prayer by Washington Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory. The nation "reverently pauses in supplication", the Cardinal said, "to remember and to pray for those who have died and to comfort all of those who grieve the loss of a loved one", expressing gratitude also for those who cared for the many sick and for those who died alone. "Our sorrow unites us to one another as a single people with compassionate hearts," the cardinal said, recalling that prayer strengthens "our awareness of our common humanity and our national unity." Prayer services will precede and conclude the swearing-in ceremony, officiated by Father Leo J. O'Donovan, a Jesuit priest and spiritual mentor to Biden, at the beginning and by Reverend Silvester Beaman, a close confidante and friend of the President-Elect in Delaware, at the end. The selection of clergy for the prayer service is not a formality. In fact it reflects the values that will guide US administration: Fr. O'Donovan is white and of Irish descent, Rev. Beaman is African-American, the first is Catholic, the latter Methodist.

Biden's America will be more pluralistic, as the choice of his cabinet members testifies to: religiously and racially diverse.

Together they will pray in front of a building that slaves built, on the podium desecrated by violent rioters who did not hesitate to brandish crosses and images of Jesus as they left behind a trail of destruction, vandalising the temple of US democracy. The Biden era will also have to reckon with white Evangelicals who saw in his predecessor a champion to follow and devoutly support with unprecedented religious enthusiasm in American history. Biden will take the oath also for them and in front of them, in the knowledge that they disown him as president and that one in three Americans regard his election as illegitimate. He will not swear his oath of office before the crowds, but in front of a group of selected few, kept at arm's length not only by the Coronavirus but also by the fear of

attacks that led to the militarization of the Capitol. Biden will be sworn in to restore the soul of a nation which, as Toqueville said, “is great because it is good”, but if it “ever ceases to be good, it will cease to be great.” And its 46th President is well aware of this.

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