



***"With you I am a Christian,
and for you I am a bishop."***

Mario J. Paredes
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Habemus Papam! On May 8, the College of Cardinals announced the good news: *We have a new Pope!* This election and event assured the Catholic Church of the millennial apostolic succession in the Petrine ministry. We have a Pope! This good news fills us with joy and hope.

His main biographical and pastoral facts – his Augustinian spirituality, the name he chose to exercise his papacy, his initial message from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica and the few characteristics of the new Pope's profile and personality that we are just beginning to know, indicate and shed light on the possible path along which he will exercise his pastoral ministry as the universal leader of the Catholic Church, and a spiritual leader for humanity.

ROBERT FRANCIS PREVOST MARTINEZ, was born on September 14, 1955, in Chicago, Illinois, United States, which makes him the first pope from the United States and the 267th in the history of the Catholic Church.

From his parents, Louis Marius Prevost and Mildred Martínez, he inherited a racial and cultural mix of Italian, French, African, and Spanish ancestries. Robert Prevost studied mathematics, theology, and Canon Law. His life and novitiate as a member of the Order of St. Augustine began in 1977, until he became – for two terms – the Prior General of the Augustinians, which also makes him the first pope from this religious community, with a presence in over 50 countries.

As an Augustinian priest, he conducted – for many years – his pastoral and missionary ministry in Peru until he was appointed Bishop of the diocese of Chiclayo and acquired his Peruvian citizenship. This dual citizenship also makes him the first Peruvian pope and the second Latin American. Finally, in the Vatican curia, he served as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops.

The evangelical and Christian imprint of St. Augustine of Hippo guides and marks his spiritual and religious life, primarily characterized by a tireless search for God in and from the very interiority of the human being. This is a search carried out in community life, with love as the center of everything. This is a love that is God's grace to transform, sustain, and guide human beings in humility to the whole truth: that of knowing we are children of God, serving all as brothers and sisters.

In his first message, the newly appointed Pope spoke of peace as the first greeting of the Risen One to the first disciples and as the greatest urgency of man and the world today. He reminded us that God's unconditional love drives out all fear and assures us that good triumphs

over evil and that Christ, the Light of the world, goes before us to build bridges and foster unity through the bond of love, *"always seeking peace, justice, always seeking to work as men and women faithful to Jesus Christ, without fear, to proclaim the Gospel, to be missionaries,"* for a Church *"of dialogue, always open to receive, like this square, with open arms to all. All those who need charity, our presence, dialogue, and love... We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that walks, a Church that always seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close, especially to those who suffer."*

With this wealth of talents and experiences, the new Pope can face the challenges that today's world poses to the Church's work and existence, to her very identity, and to the evangelizing work of the Church, comprised of all of us who are baptized. May this accumulation of experiences and gifts inspire all citizens of the world and those of us who have – through faith and baptism in Christ – the commitment to be and build the Church.

Many grave problems afflict human life and our social coexistence today: armed conflicts, climate change, the unjust distribution of wealth and justice, the impoverishment of the great majority, social inequality, food insecurity, the violation of human rights, the great movements of human migration, etc., the installation of dictatorial regimes, the loss of biodiversity, the unequal distribution of technological opportunities, etc.

And within the Church: secularization, the "cultural" tendencies of postmodernity, a "culture of death," sexual crimes by clerics, internal polarization and tensions between generational or ideological blocs, the crisis of priestly and religious vocations, etc., cast doubt on or hinder the Church's ability to fulfill in the world, thoroughly and with evangelical authenticity, the task entrusted to us by Jesus.

All these problems today become cries and challenges to the Church's mission in the world, led by Leo XIV.

A man, a religious, a Christian, and pastor, whose racial and cultural mix, knowledge of several languages, academic training, Augustinian spirituality, missionary pastoral experience in the neediest communities, service as general of the Augustinians, and as head of the dicastery for bishops worldwide, etc., qualify him as a pope whose whole humanity fits within his head and heart, as a pastor of peace, who can reconcile the ends of the earth, guide the Church as a house of open doors for all, of compassion and mercy, as the Gospel demands and excites us with the possible continuity in the ministry carried out by his predecessor Francis, but – especially – with the very logic of the Gospel.

As President of the Academy of Catholic Leaders, present in twenty-two countries, I congratulate all of us who make up this institution at the service and in support of the evangelization of the Church in society, for the choice of the name of the pontificate of the new Pope: LEO XIV. History remembers Leo XIII as the father of the Social Doctrine of the Church, especially with the publication of his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891.

The name Leo XIV indicates a renewed interest in the Church's mission to illuminate and try to solve the serious social problems that today hurt many, especially the "discarded" of the earth.

The Church's Social Doctrine lays the foundation of the Academy's vision and mission over which I preside, and Leo XIV encourages us to continue in the call to search for a better Church and world, according to the criteria of the Gospel. All of which renew our hope of better times for all in this jubilee year of hope.

May fair winds and smooth seas guide the Barque of Peter, with Leo XIV at the helm! Ad multos annos!

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