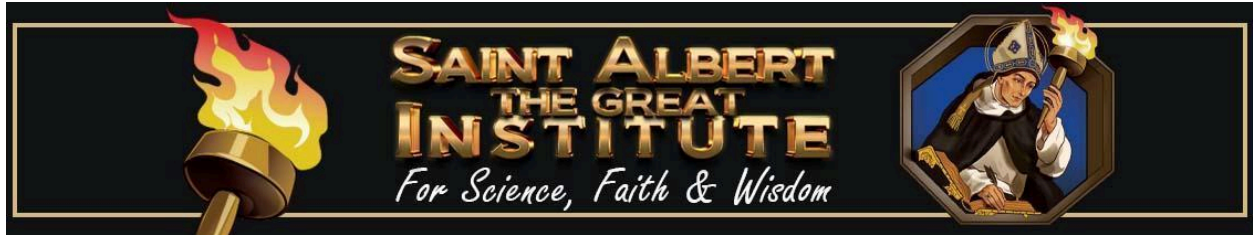




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Thematic Issue (Inspiring Faith)

SAGI: The Greatest Experiment

A New Pope in the Jubilee Year of Hope: Some First Impressions

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Words of Wisdom: *On 8 May 2025, Robert Francis Prevost, a native of Chicago IL, former bishop of Chiclayo, Peru, and Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops was elected the 266th successor of St Peter. The only other papal election to have coincided with a Jubilee Year took place in 1700, when Giovanni Francesco Albani succeeded Innocent XII and took the name Clement XI. The following few first impressions of Pope Leo XIV reflect the hope inspired by Jubilee 2025 and by the initial gestures of the new sovereign pontiff.*

Signs of Things to Come?

After a brief conclave of just over a day (7-8 May 2025), the election of Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost and his appearance on the loggia of St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican as Pope Leo XIV gave rise to wide acclaim and general rejoicing. Before the newly elected pontiff even emerged onto the balcony and began to speak, he was already communicating signs of considerable significance which observers the world over were free to witness and interpret.

Nomen est omen.

Just after proclaiming that a new pope had been elected, the Cardinal Protodeacon of the Roman Church, Dominique Mamberti, announced that the supreme pontiff would be known as Leo XIV. The choice of the papal name, Leo, at once called to mind his illustrious predecessor Leo XIII, the last pope of that name, whose long pontificate (r. 1878-1903) led the Church through the challenges of the Industrial Revolution into the early years of the twentieth

century. The first Pope Leo (r. 440-461), of course, was a saint, a doctor of the Church, and one of only a few popes to be distinguished by the epithet “the Great.”¹

The ancient Romans coined a clever Latin aphorism: *Nomen et omen*, which means that a name contains prophetic significance for its bearer. The selection of a regnal name that had not been in use for over a century suggested several facts. First, the new pope, despite his respect for his immediate predecessor, did not feel compelled to adopt the name Francis. Second, it implied that Leo XIV has a distinct sense of church history. Later, during his inauguration, Pope Leo revealed that the assumption of his regnal name was in fact an appeal to the figure of Giacchino Pecci, Leo XIII, renowned for his adamant support for the working classes overwhelmed by the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution. Leo XIII was widely recognized likewise for his intellectual aplomb, as evidenced by his opening of the Vatican Library to external scholars and by his promotion of the philosophy and theology of St Thomas Aquinas.

Robert Prevost worked extensively as a missionary, and then as a bishop, among the poor and disadvantaged in Peru. His academic accomplishments include a Bachelor of Science degree (BS) in mathematics and philosophy from Villanova University in Pennsylvania (1977), a Master of Divinity (MDiv) from the Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, and a Doctorate in canon law (JCD) from the Pontifical University of St Thomas (Angelicum), Rome. He is fluent in several languages, including English, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese.

The inspiration of Pope Leo XIII may well portend for the Church another pontificate committed to the ongoing improvement of conditions for the poor and working classes, as well as a renewal of philosophy and theology in Catholic seminaries, novitiates, colleges, and universities. Time will tell.

First Appearance

So much for the announcement of the new pope. His first appearance on St Peter's balcony also was laden with significance. For many, the resumption by Leo XIV of the rochet, silk mozetta, and sumptuous papal stole displaying the

¹ Other popes surnamed or designated as “the Great” include Gregory I (r. 590-604) and Nicholas I (858-867); many accord it as well to John Paul II (r. 1978-2005), although it is not official.

Princes of the Apostles Peter and Paul was a welcome sign of continuity with the conventional garb of the Roman pontiff. In 2013 Pope Francis had discarded the use of the rochet and papal mozzetta. Many found it reassuring, on such an auspicious occasion, to see a return to the formal garb of the pope.

Pope Leo's first greeting from the *loggia* echoed that of Jesus to His disciples on the day of His Resurrection: "Peace be with you!" [Jn 20:19] Like Jesus, Pope Leo repeated the greeting. The pope's prepared remarks, assuring the faithful of his desire to serve all in the Church and all those of goodwill were warmly received. The frequent references to Christ in this first official message hinted that an unambiguously Christocentric pontificate had been launched. Subsequent statements by Leo XIV over the past month, including to the media and to the diplomatic corps, have reinforced this impression.

The ready smile and ease with which the pontiff engaged the crowd evinced a geniality that came across as natural and altogether sincere. The accuracy of this initial impression was confirmed repeatedly by countless subsequent testimonies of close family members, friends, and associates interviewed by various media outlets. What emerges from so many witnesses is a figure personally well liked for his natural and cheerful affability.

The concluding blessing, given *urbi et orbi*, that is, to the City of Rome, of which Leo is now bishop, and to the whole world, of which he is now universal pastor, was pronounced in Latin, although it was not chanted. Cameras on the balcony revealed that the page from which the apostolic blessing was given did not contain any musical notation. This was in marked contrast to radio and film recordings of earlier, twentieth-century first papal blessings, when the popes chanted the apostolic blessing and the crowds made the appropriate responses, also in chant. Given that for the previous dozen years Pope Francis did not use chant in the sacred liturgy or in great public events, it is understandable that a chant version of the apostolic blessing may not have been ready at hand.

On the following Sunday, 11 May, Leo XIV dispelled any notion that he is hesitant about singing, when, from the *loggia* of St Peter's, he intoned the *Regina Coeli* the Marian anthem and prayer that replace the *Angelus* during the Easter season. The occasion summoned up memories of Pope John Paul II, whose rich

singing voice resonated often through St Peter's Basilica or over St Peter's Square during the sacred liturgy and public devotions. In the Eastern churches, the liturgy is always sung. Leo XIV greeted Eastern Christians quite warmly in the days following his election and encouraged them to maintain and cherish their ancient traditions. He may have been sending a subtle signal that Latin chant may be set to enjoy a revival in the West.

Two Marian Pilgrimages

Between his election on 8 May and his inaugural ceremonies on 11 May, Pope Leo XIV made a pilgrimage on Saturday, 10 May, to the Augustinian shrine of Our Lady of Good Counsel in Genazzano, some fifty kilometers southeast of Rome. There, on the first Saturday after his election, the pope entrusted his pontificate to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Leo's first pilgrimage as pope to this Marian shrine is significant on several levels.

First, as a member of the Order of St Augustine, Robert Francis Prevost had naturally cultivated a devotion to the Mother of Good Counsel and cherished this image of the Virgin Mary.

Second, and this dimension is well worth noting, over the centuries several popes had gone on pilgrimage to Genazzano to invoke the intercession of Our Lady of Good Counsel in challenging circumstances. Pope Pius IX, for instance, just before withdrawing permanently behind the Leonine walls of the Vatican as a self-declared "prisoner of the Vatican" in September 1870, had first visited the shrine of Genazzano. It was in fact his last pilgrimage outside the Vatican. He commended himself and his future to Our Lady of Good Counsel.

His immediate successor, Leo XIII, likewise wanted to go to Genazzano upon his election, but, in protest against the confiscation of the Papal States, remained in the Vatican. The Augustinians sent him a white scapular which had been touched to the paper-thin fresco of Our Lady of Good Counsel at the shrine. Leo XIII then endowed this scapular of Our Lady of Good Counsel with papal privileges and actually inserted the invocation "Our Lady of Good Counsel" in the Litany of Loreto. Hence the first papal pilgrimage of Leo XIV to the Madonna of Good Counsel in Genazzano held a significant connection with his much-admired predecessor and namesake.

On his return trip from Genazzano on 10 May, Pope Leo stopped at the papal Basilica of St Mary Major on the Esquiline Hill, Rome's premiere church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. There he stopped to pray at the tomb of his immediate predecessor, Francis, and then venerated the great icon of Our Lady under the title *Salus populi Romani* (Health and Salvation of the People of Rome) displayed in the Pauline or Borghese Chapel of the basilica.

Both these Marian pilgrimages, undertaken so soon after his election as pope, signalize that Leo XIV, like Leo XIII, possesses a strong devotion to the Mother of God. It will be interesting to see what measures Leo XIV will take to instruct the Church about the figure and mystery of Mary and how he will advance Marian devotion.

Hope in the Future

Obviously a month is scarcely sufficient time to project the main emphases and goals of any given pontificate. The initial signs, however, suggest that the current pontiff is a clear thinker and a theologian possessed of a keen pastoral instinct and a respect for canon law. He is at home with the sacred liturgy and enjoys Gregorian chant. At the heart of his Augustinian vocation is a strong personal bond with Christ and with His Mother. Pope Leo's ease in adapting to his new circumstances bode well as a pope comfortable with his newly bestowed authority and open to listening to various sides of an issue. His invitation to Cardinal Robert Sarah, the former prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, to represent the Holy See in July 2025 at the shrine of Ste Anne d'Auray in Brittany, France, during the four-hundredth anniversary celebrations of the apparitions of the saint to Yves Nicolazic suggests that Pope Leo XIV appreciates the services once rendered by his cardinals, that he holds them in high esteem and that he bears them fraternal charity.

The Jubilee Year 2025 extends to the Church the promise of hope. May the pontificate of Leo XIV serve as an fulfilment of this hope in a peaceful and blessed future.