

Pope Leo XIV

On the morning of his election as Pope, I texted three Augustinian friends stating that I was hoping our new Pope would be Cardinal Tagle or Cardinal Robert Prevost. I thought Tagle offered a dynamism that may attract our youth to strengthen and share their lively faith with the world. Having been under Augustinian influence as my spiritual directors for 37 years of priesthood, I thought someone trained in the spirituality of Augustine would be a most welcome gift to the Church. His name was on "the list" with a note that he is the "least-American" of the ten American cardinals at the conclave having served 20 years in Peru. Perhaps this would bolster his chances to those, like me, who thought we would never have an American Pope. Personally, I am a big fan of Cardinals Tobin and McElroy as well. To everyone's surprise, we have an American Pope, a Chicagoan from the southside, an alum of Nova Nation, who as we have learned is a White Sox's fan. Quickly we will learn so many other things about him as we embrace him in a particular way as "our Pope." My Augustinian friends all expressed a "happy shock" as they tried to process the great news.

Soon we will appreciate his many gifts as being a man of the poor with tremendous empathy for the needy. Many say his choice of the name Leo signals his devotion to social justice and the rights of workers. It seems he will continue Francis' efforts on synodality. We pray for the fullness of grace of state, so as I referenced Robert Barron's thought last week, he will know best the mind of God leading us to a greater love for this God of surprises. He knows many languages; may he show us the language of God's infinite love.

As this is so different and special for us, "a local guy" if that is not irreverent, we get to appreciate all that it offers. While I am writing the day after his election, here are some things that come to mind. We may know him as an Augustinian or as a Cardinal, but now we need to come to know him as Pope, inspired with the grace of God to lead us to greater fidelity and appreciation of relationship that God offers to us daily. The excitement that comes with "one of our own" brings to mind that God calls you and me to a special vocation in the Church, a way to holiness that is possible with God's grace and our "letting go," so God may bring all to fruition. It is timely now as our Sunday readings focus on Christ as the Bread of Life whose Body and Blood we eat and drink. This is not talk of cannibalism but the most vital tenet of our faith: Christ is the Bread of Life, the only and everything that can nourish our needs, embrace us for who we fully are, forgive and sustain us as our "food for the journey." We have to stop looking elsewhere for fulfillment, direction, and understanding. Christ is the Bread of Life. When we are in love with ourselves, the world and all that God has created, Christ is the Bread of Life. When we feel distant from ourselves, others and this loving God, Christ is the Bread of Life. There is no other: Christ, yesterday, today, and forever!

The election of Pope Leo XIV reminded me of travelling to Philly as a novice in the seminary to see Pope John Paul II. I remember vividly watching him pray on the kneeler at the Cathedral Basilica so keenly focused on our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I wondered what gift he had in conversing with our Lord, what is he saying or hearing? Then, I realized he has no different gift, channel, or opportunity than you and me. God is longing to commune with us 24/7. We have to make the effort. His intimacy is opened to all, at all times, regardless the situation. Let the thrill of this "great joy" that is Pope Leo invigorate our love for the Lord, for the Bread of Life, so we may become alive for Christ, each other, and for the world.

Viva Pope Leo! May Augustine bless him!

~John Fisher, OSFS