

New Pope: An Augustinian Pope

Fr Kieran O'Mahony is an Augustinian friar
resident in Dublin.



Pope Leo XIV recites the Regina Coeli for the first time from St Peter's Basilica

I happened to be in Rome when the announcement was made: '*Habemus papam.*' On the balcony, Bob seemed to me a bit nervous, holding back tears and content. If God calls you and you respond, at a deep level all is grace.

Pope Francis can be best understood as a Jesuit from South America. The South American Church engaged early and earnestly with the Second Vatican Council. The Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) built a participative model of Church and went on to make a fundamental option for the poor. Add to that the great Jesuit gift of discern-

ment – what is God asking of me/us in this situation? – and we begin to understand the significance of the synodal path. The roots lie proximately in the evolution of the Latin American Church but remotely much further back in the Ignatian tradition.

One of the anxieties after the death of Pope Francis was that the progress already achieved might be halted. Pope Leo XIV is a firm supporter of the synodal path. As he said on the evening he was elected, 'To all of you, brothers and sisters in Rome, in Italy, throughout the world: we want to be a synodal Church, a Church that moves forward, a Church that al-

ways seeks peace, that always seeks charity, that always seeks to be close above all to those who are suffering.'

On the 10 May, speaking to the cardinals in the Sistine Chapel, Pope Leo expanded further: 'In this regard, I would like us to renew together today our complete commitment to the path that the universal Church has now followed for decades in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis masterfully and concretely set it forth in *Evangelii Gaudium*, from which I would like to highlight several fundamental points: the return to the primacy of Christ in proclamation (cf. No. 11); the missionary conversion of the entire Christian community (cf. No. 9); growth in collegiality and synodality (cf. No. 33); attention to the *sensus fidei* (cf. Nos. 119–120), especially in its most authentic and inclusive forms, such as popular piety (cf. No. 123); loving care for the least and the rejected (cf. No. 53); courageous and trusting dialogue with the contemporary world in its various components and realities (cf. No. 84; Second Vatican Council, pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1–2).'

In other words, the new way of being Church – a Church of participation, communion and above all mission – continues under the grace of the Holy Spirit.

What does Pope Leo bring to his new pastoral responsibility? Again, the South American experience is a key. Bob Prevost worked 'on the ground' as a missionary, a priest, lecturer and as a bishop. As our prior general, he gained hands-on knowledge of the global Church, regularly visiting the fifty or so countries where

On the first evening, Pope Leo affirmed: 'I am an Augustinian, a son of St Augustine, who once said, "With you I am a Christian, and for you I am a bishop."'

the Augustinians are active. He is a good listener, speaking only when necessary and intervening always in a constructive way.

On the first evening, Pope Leo affirmed: 'I am an Augustinian, a son of St Augustine, who once said, "With you I am a Christian, and for you I am a bishop."'

All the great spiritualities resemble each other, while having characteristic configurations. The particular configuration of Augustinian spirituality is marked by a deep interiority, a return to the heart and a listening to the voice of God within. It offers explicit commitment to community life, leading to collaboration, dialogue and communion. The opening words of the *Rule of St Augustine* give a good flavour of the vision: 'Before all else, beloved, love God and then your neighbour, for these are the chief commandments given to us. The following are the precepts we order you living the monastery to observe. The main purpose of your having one together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God with one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32).'

Pope Leo will bring the same clarity, the same emphasis on charity, to his new ministry as the chief shepherd of the flock.