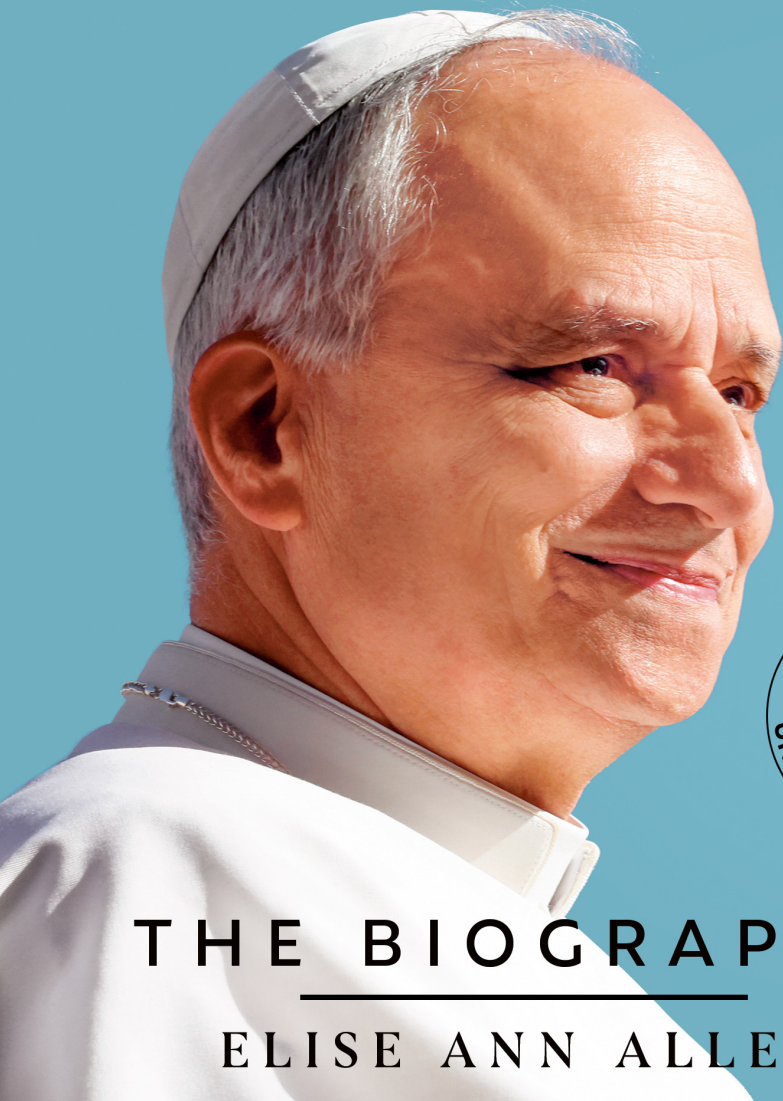


# POPE

## LEO XIV



### THE BIOGRAPHY

ELISE ANN ALLEN

# POPE LEO XIV

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*The Biography*

ELISE ANN ALLEN

*Translated by Stephen R. Di Trolio*



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INTRODUCTION  
TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

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*Friendship with Christ, which forms the basis of faith, is not just one aid among many others for building the future; it is our guiding star. . . . It is when our friendships reflect this intense bond with Jesus that they really become sincere, generous and true.*

*Dear young people, love one another! Love one another in Christ! Know how to see Jesus in others. Friendship can truly change the world. Friendship is a path to peace.*

—POPE LEO XIV, PRAYER WITH YOUNG PEOPLE  
AT TOR VERGATA, AUGUST 2, 2025

EVER SINCE POPE Leo XIV was elected as history's first pope from the United States on May 8, 2025, one of the most common questions I have received is "What impact will his American background have on his papacy and how he is perceived?" I've done several presentations of the original Spanish-language edition of this book, and one of the most common questions I have been asked by Americans is "What is his message to Americans? What, as the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church but also as an American, is his message to American Catholics at this time?"

From my observations of the man, my interactions with him

spanning several years, and my lengthy conversations with him for this book, I think what experience and what his own life tell us is that his message to his American flock can be summed up in the words he spoke to young people during a vigil event for the Jubilee of Young People in August 2025: “Know how to see Jesus in others. Friendship can truly change the world. Friendship is a path to peace.”

It is no secret that contemporary society, and therefore also the contemporary Church, is deeply polarized and divided. This polarization is something Pope Leo voices deep concern about in this book, and it is also something Pope Francis often condemned, especially in the later years of his papacy, specifically calling out the blind embrace of political and religious ideologies as a form of radicalization and a main contributing factor to the sharp divisions that have lacerated global society and that are acutely felt within the United States. Some critics even suggested that Pope Francis himself contributed to this polarization by the absolutist manner in which he characterized certain groups within the Church.

In the United States, life tends to revolve around politics, so much so that foreigners often comment about it, and the culture has become increasingly tribalized. Citizens now determine, at least in part, where they live, where they worship, and where their children go to school based not on factors such as location or the features of the area itself but rather on how the surrounding neighborhood tends to vote or on whether the pastor or teachers are considered “progressive” or “traditional.” There are no longer just neighborhoods but “red” and “blue” zones, communities divided into “liberal” and “conservative” whose members often view those with differing opinions as enemies.

In June 2023, my husband and incomparable veteran Vatican analyst, John L. Allen, Jr. (whom a Vatican spokesman once

introduced to Pope Benedict XVI as “the man who needs no introduction!”), wrote his eleventh book and, I believe, the magnum opus of his impressive and distinguished career, *Catholics and Contempt: How Catholic Media Fuel Today’s Fights, and What to Do About It*, which analyzes the intense culture of animosity that has gripped so much of the world, and the Church, in recent decades.

In the book, John takes a deep dive into the “culture of contempt,” the lust to hurt and discredit, through whatever means possible, perceived opponents who are seen not just as wrong but as evil. The book, which specifically examines the media’s contribution to this phenomenon, traces the rise of “cheap speech” and the change in the overall tone of public discourse due to shifts in digital technology that have resulted, among other things, in a so-called boom industry of selling outrage and fomenting angst. The diagnosis is that people are no longer capable of understanding, much less entering into respectful conversation with, ideological rivals.

The Catholic Church has long understood itself as the evangelizer of culture and as the place where the answer to the troubles plaguing the world can be found. However, this “culture of contempt” has also seeped into the pews and has “evangelized,” so to speak, large portions of the Church, including much of the Church in the United States. In just the past decade, a range of Catholic media platforms and commentators have popped up online and across social networks and have contributed to this contemptuous culture; increasingly, the Church’s pastors in the United States have also become divided. These divisions had already been brewing for many years but bubbled up and boiled over due to dispute over many of Pope Francis’s pastoral and structural reforms, so much so that American criticism of Francis became a hallmark of his twelve-year papacy and gave many

Americans a bad rap during the Francis years. The toxic rhetoric and divides that emerged during that time have become an open, festering wound in the American Church that has been worsened by the political climate.

The United States in particular has long been perceived as overly political, and a frequent criticism by many American cardinals, bishops, and parish priests over the years has been that a major problem exists regarding the intersection of faith and politics—namely, that faith has become overpoliticized and is often used as a political tool to wage war against ideological opponents. This is a phenomenon everywhere, and it has increased with the rise in conservative, nationalist, populist political leaders who tout their policies as an expression of the authentic gospel message as God intended it to be conveyed and applied in the world.

From my own personal experience presenting the Spanish edition of this book in the United States, many Americans are fed up with the current “culture of contempt” and are tired of being angry. They are thirsting for some sort of remedy and view Pope Leo, with his meek personality, his bright smile, and his Augustinian formation in unified and harmonious community life, as someone who can potentially offer a way out.

So, what is this way out? What pastoral and spiritual message can Leo, as an American, potentially offer to this contemptuous and often toxic environment that plagues the world, especially his home country of the United States? It can be summed up in one word: friendship.

Back in 2023, my husband, in *Catholics and Contempt*, proposed friendship as the only real solution to the contemptuous state of contemporary society and to the cavernous divisions in the United States. John’s suggested remedy was to simply remember how to get along—how to sit down together, perhaps over a

good meal with good wine, and enjoy each other's company and in the process remember that in spite of differences or disagreements, we can still get along and even be friends. He invoked the 1987 drama *Babette's Feast*, a favorite movie of Pope Francis (I won't spoil it for those who want to watch!), to drive the point home.

Earlier this year, a longtime close friend of the pope, Armando Jesús Lovera, made much the same argument in his own Spanish-language book, *De Roberto a León*, detailing his long-standing friendship with Robert Prevost, whom he met in the 1990s and who now occupies arguably the most important position in the world, calling himself Leo XIV. In his book, Armando offers a glimpse into the internal life and spirituality of Pope Leo, rooted in the Augustinian concept of genuine and authentic friendship as a path to God. Pope Leo himself said on the day of his election, "I am an Augustinian, a son of Saint Augustine." At the heart of Augustinian spirituality is a harmonious life in common. The preface of Saint Augustine's Rule stresses the need to place love of God and neighbor before all else, based on Jesus's instructions in the gospel, with chapter 1 of the Rule stating, "The main purpose for your having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God, with one heart and one soul." Within this community life, friendship is seen not just as human but as a path to God.

In a brief personal introduction to Armando's book, Leo quoted his August 2025 speech to youth, saying, "Friendship can truly change the world. Friendship is a path to peace." Within the book, Armando reflects at one point on how, just prior to being created a cardinal in 2023, then-Bishop Robert Prevost was asked what he liked to do in his free time. His response was that he most enjoyed "being with my friends. Meeting different people and learning about their gifts. . . . Living in community has been

one of the greatest gifts of my life. Sharing what we're going through, opening up to others, building together. . . . That's priceless. Discovering the gift of friendship leads us to Jesus Himself. Having authentic friendship is beautiful. I believe it's one of the greatest gifts God has given us."

In the presentation of Armando's book in Rome in October 2025, Augustinian Father Juan Antonio Cabrera Montero offered an extended reflection on the Augustinian notion of friendship, saying that authentic friendship is something the modern world has lost but that it can offer a path forward in a divided era and can respond to the need to "recover the true meaning of humanity. . . . In a fragmented world, we must rediscover that friends not only accompany one another in time but also guide one another to eternity."

Leo himself has illustrated on multiple occasions in his time as pope that friendship and community continue to be guiding principles for his life. Tied to this, he has also begun carving out a path beyond polarization for the Church, and he has done it from day one of his papacy, when he uttered his first words to the world, "Peace be with you," and said he wanted to build bridges.

He gave the world the first step on this path during his very first public audience after his election on May 12, 2025, with members of the international press who were in Rome covering the papal transition and conclave. Leo quoted from his predecessor Pope Francis's message for the 2025 World Day of Social Communications, saying, "Let us disarm communication of all prejudice and resentment, fanaticism and even hatred; let us free it from aggression. We do not need loud, forceful communication but rather communication that is capable of listening and of gathering the voices of the weak who have no voice. Let us disarm words and we will help to disarm the world. Disarmed and disarming communication allows us to share a different view of the

world and to act in a manner consistent with our human dignity.”

Later, in his May 28 general audience catechesis reflecting on the parable of the Good Samaritan, he spoke about encounters with people we meet on the path of life and the choices we make, saying, “Life is made up of encounters, and in these encounters, we emerge for what we are.” In this regard, he pointed specifically to the discrepancy in the parable between the religious and clerical status of those who pass by the man dying on the side of the road and the choice of a Samaritan, a perceived enemy, to have compassion, saying, “The practice of worship does not automatically lead to being compassionate. Indeed, before being a religious matter, compassion is a question of humanity! Before being believers, we are called to be human.”

The call to disarm our language, to transition from aggression to respect in the way we engage with one another publicly and in private, and to view one another first of all as fellow human beings who have dignity and deserve respect regardless of age, creed, or state in life—an unborn child, a migrant, a prisoner on death row, the young, the elderly, “liberal” or “conservative”—is the invitation that Pope Leo has offered the world in his first few months as pope.

While he is ultimately pastor of the universal Church and very much sees himself and his role as such, meaning he is issuing this call to view and treat others with dignity and respect to the world, as an American his words have a particular echo among his fellow Catholics in the United States. There are doubtless many messages that Pope Leo would like to convey to American society and the American Church, but this, arguably, might be the most essential.



## INTRODUCTION

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**A**LMOST HALF A century ago, With the election of John Paul II, the Church changed course, marking a departure from its 455-year tradition of solely Italian popes. Since then, each new conclave has provoked new questions among millions of people, whether or not they are believers: “Who will be the new pope? Where will he be from?” Benedict XVI was born in Germany, and Francis was from Argentina. On May 8, 2025, a new answer to this question emerged, marking a significant moment: Robert Francis Prevost, now Leo XIV, became the first pontiff to hold both American and Peruvian citizenship. This is a dual belonging that has shaped his life and is reflected in his way of speaking, hearing, and holding the hands of those who come from different backgrounds.

I have covered news on the Vatican from Rome for twelve years, the last eight as a correspondent for *Crux*. I identify with the pope not only in our shared American nationality but also in a sense that I can only describe as a “closeness” stemming from our previous meetings and our shared history, both in Peru and the Vatican. Nevertheless, when I was with him at the summer papal residence in Castel Gandolfo, an hour from Rome, about to start our official interview, everything seemed new. I asked myself, *Has anything changed?*

I MET ROBERT Prevost in December 2018 during a trip I took to Lima to investigate on abuse in the Church, specifically focusing on Sodalitium Christianae Vitae. At that time, Prevost was the bishop of Chiclayo and the president of the Commission on the Safeguard of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference (CEP),<sup>1</sup> an institution for which he also served as second vice president. Despite this critical position, I was especially impressed by the humility, candor, tranquility, and sense of transparency he conveyed in our conversations even though it was our first time meeting. In that initial conversation, he spoke calmly about the events that I was investigating. He did not project any guardedness; instead, he listened attentively and responded with confidence, openness, and honesty, which I found, at the very least, unexpected. The gentle manner in which he interacted put me at ease. Unexpectedly, I found we were having not an off-the-record interview with calculated answers from a cautious prelate who was trying to get rid of an investigative journalist as soon as possible, but rather a real conversation. Our discussion was natural, and although he didn't say as much as he could have, he listened, engaged, and gave sincere, direct answers to my questions. At the end of the interview, he handed me his personal card so that I could contact him if I needed to do any follow-up—something that not everyone, especially bishops, would typically do with an investigative journalist.

Five years later, in 2023, Prevost arrived in Rome, assigned by Pope Francis as the prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, one of the most important positions in the Vatican. This was the second time I met him in person, this time alongside my husband, who is also a journalist. We had asked for an opportunity to welcome our American compatriot to his new home in Rome and, despite the many years that had passed, the change in location, and his new position, I felt that Robert Prevost was the same man I had met in Lima. Our contact was limited during his first months in

Rome, especially since Prevost maintained a low profile, so we decided to invite him over for dinner. In our home, I was able to see that he maintained a kindness and closeness in the personal sphere as well as the public one. Prevost was an excellent guest who enjoyed everything that we offered him. He also punctuated our conversations with frequent smiles and jokes while we spoke of sports, Peru, and his recent experience in the Vatican. This cardinal and prefect of a powerful dicastery, who would later be pope, showed us that night that he was a simple man who was more devoted to the people around him than to himself.



NOW, IN CASTEL Gandolfo, the beautiful residence in the Alban Hills where for centuries the popes have spent their summers, I wait for the inaugural interview with Pope Leo XIV, which will be his first formal meeting with the press, as well as his first exposure to all Catholics and the wider world. I expect this to be different from all our previous exchanges due to his new role as pope. Yet when he shows up, he greets me with a warm smile and an outstretched hand, instantly asking about my husband, and I immediately think to myself, *He is the same person—natural, open, and impressive*. No matter what place, position, or title he has held or is presently holding, Prevost is faithful to who he is.

“Who is Robert Prevost? Who is Pope Leo XIV?” I ask him as he takes off his glasses and we both sit at a small round table. His response is measured and firm:

Certainly, someone who has a deep appreciation for humanity; but within that humanity, a deep faith that somehow the mystery of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, comes to all of us. I think I'm a person who has the

ability to sit down with other people and recognize the goodness in them. In conversation, dialogue, respect, somehow I'm able to see that good, whether or not the other person is a person of faith. Somehow [I can] share part of the goodness of life, the joy and the hope of what it means to be alive, the gift of life. For myself, especially as an Augustinian, to see [that] as sons and daughters of God, we're called to a greater good and that everything we're doing here is somehow oriented toward the fullness of life and love in God's hands. A lot of that's a mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it, much less to be able to explain it.

Then, in a more personal tone, the pope adds:

I think there is a big part of me that just somehow enjoys living, enjoys meeting other people, enjoys serving others. I find a lot of meaning, in my case, having given my life to serve in the Augustinian order . . . called to a specific vocation to walk with other people and to teach people to have that same attitude of “giving your life for others makes a lot more sense than being selfish.” When you know Jesus Christ and when you recognize that God has called us, that God has created us, that God has loved us, to share that with other people is just a magnificent gift.<sup>2</sup>



POPE LEO XIV, in many regards, has the profile of a pope for the twenty-first century. His multicultural formation and his experiences as a missionary, head of the Augustinian Order, and prefect

of the Dicastery for Bishops, a position that offered him opportunities to interact with bishops from across the world, have given him a unique global perspective. The pope speaks English, Spanish, and Italian fluently and knows French, an ability that permits him to move with ease among different cultures.

He is also familiar with the digital world. Before his election, he had a public presence on social media, such as X (formerly Twitter), and he utilized digital tools like a smartphone and WhatsApp, demonstrating his openness to clear communication and engagement in the current modes of conversation. In fact, Pope Leo XIV has openly declared that the revolution in artificial intelligence and the questions it raises regarding work and workers' rights are one of the reasons he chose his papal name, in honor of Pope Leo XIII, who is considered the father of the modern social doctrine of the Church.

Those who know him speak of a man who enjoys life, loves learning, and is eager to encounter new people, cultures, and realities. He is someone who is attentive to the most fragile social contexts and the plight of the poor. He is a man of dialogue and action who seeks out creative solutions to people's needs. He is an attentive pastor, effective administrator, and efficient leader, capable of resolving complex problems without creating divisions. For these reasons, people speak of him as a good friend and trustworthy brother.

In sum, Leo XIV is for many a "citizen of the world," a pontiff for modern times, and, due to his background and personality, a missionary for the twenty-first century.



AT THE TIME he was elected pope, there was little public information on Robert Prevost's statements and actions, speeches, homilies,

or even his positions on polemical issues over the years, except for a few fairly recent tweets weighing in on some positions promoted by the vice president of the United States, J. D. Vance.<sup>3</sup> Although many pictures have emerged of Prevost alongside Peruvian faithful in various activities and celebrations, there is a lack of information available on his speeches and messages, especially during his years as a missionary in Peru, as the leader of the Augustinian house in Trujillo, and later as the bishop of Chiclayo. Beyond a few public positions, Prevost was, in general, a relatively unknown figure who has since been catapulted to the world stage.

So, throughout this book, those who have known Robert Prevost and worked with him will fill in the missing details, giving color to the rough sketch of his work and life, painting the image of a Chicago native turned missionary and later appointed pope. The testimonies, opinions, and anecdotes on his actions as a person and religious leader help develop this profile and offer a view into Leo XIV throughout his life, from the distant and recent past, as well as a glimpse of what the world might expect to see from him as he responds to the challenges of modern society going forward.

This book also contains an exclusive interview with the pope that was recorded over two meetings. In the first, which occurred on July 10, 2025 at the papal residence in Castel Gandolfo, the new pope reflects on his life, including his accomplishments in his roles as pastor, missionary, bishop, and cardinal. These words have enriched the chapters of this book, offering the pope's own perspective alongside that of those close to him and his collaborators, commenting on various issues involving his life, work style, and positions. The second meeting took place on July 30, 2025 in his temporary residence, the Palazzo del Sant'Uffizio in the Vatican. In this interview, Pope Leo offers ideas on the present

and future of the Church, reflecting on a variety of ecclesial and geopolitical situations and how he sees these issues at the beginning of his papacy. He also shares his initial approach to addressing them. On some issues he has a clear idea, while on others he does not. This second interview is presented in the last chapter of this book in the original question-and-answer format.

In this way, Pope Leo XIV's reflections on his life and ministry are woven throughout each page of this book, inviting readers to discover what has been said about him, as well as what he has said about himself. Beginning with his childhood, the roots of his vocation, and his desire to serve God, it then moves chronologically to his time in Chulucanas and Trujillo, providing information related to the cultural and ecclesial context of Peru when Prevost arrived as a young priest in the 1980s. The story then turns to his time as a leader in the Augustinians and his service as the bishop of Chiclayo. Finally, the book gives insight into Pope Leo's time as a cardinal in Rome, where he worked inside of the Roman Curia, and the details of the conclave that elected him as pope. As previously mentioned, the final chapter explores his early steps as pope and his vision of the future through a question-and-answer style interview, in which he considers a strategy to address contemporary issues.

Thus, this book offers a narrative about the pope, allowing readers to better understand the man behind the papacy. It provides readers the opportunity to embark on a journey of discovery, learning more about this new pontiff and his thought processes as we are taken through scenes of his life and ecclesial career by the voices of his family, his friends, his colleagues, and the faithful who have been with him throughout the years. The pope's own reflections shape this story as he participates in narrating his own life, from childhood to the present, exploring how it will unfold in the future. Although the final chapter functions

as a standalone interview segment, it is intended to be read within the context of the book as a whole, as it would be impossible to understand and fully appreciate Leo XIV's vision for the future without seeing the whole frame of his life, including past decisions made in the many roles he has served in.

So I invite readers to embark on the same journey I have undertaken to discover who Pope Leo XIV is by learning from his fascinating life and ministry, as told by those who knew him and worked closely with him for many years, as well as by the pope himself, who offers commentary on his life from his time as a small boy who played at serving Mass to his election as the Successor of Peter.

## ROOTS

*Family and the Vocation of the Young Prevost*

**W**HITE SMOKE. THE chimney of the Sistine Chapel had been the most watched place in the world for two consecutive days when it received the sudden visit from two seagulls with white heads and gray wings. This image of them alongside a baby seagull began to circulate on the internet in videos and photos as a positive sign for the Church. These birds often fly to the roof of the Sistine Chapel, when it begins to warm each time there is a smoke signal brewing, whether black or white, indicating an imminent announcement of the cardinals' conclave over sixty feet below. Millions of people from across the world were waiting anxiously for the white smoke to rise after two instances of black smoke and four rounds of voting, one round less than when Pope Francis was elected in March 2013.<sup>1</sup> It was a very quick decision, according to experts, especially considering it took place in the context of a perceived polarized setting with those eagerly awaiting a decision wondering whether the cardinals would elect someone who would continue the path already traced, change it, or take some steps backward.<sup>2</sup> So, at 6:07 P.M. on May 8, 2025,

the white smoke was met with commotion and an explosion of applause by the faithful, tourists, and curious bystanders that filled St. Peter's Square and the streets of the Vatican. Just one hour and six minutes later, at 7:13 P.M., Cardinal Protodeacon Dominique Mamberti dispelled all doubts from the balcony of the basilica: *Habemus Papam*. We have a pope.

One of the biggest mysteries surrounding each conclave is what goes on in the minds of the cardinals—in this case a total of 133—as they elect a new pope. What are they thinking about? What are their criteria? In their minds, who has the profile to be the next pope? Who, in their judgments, are the candidates with the best chance of being elected? No one except the cardinals knows the answers to these questions. Nonetheless, after each historic election by the College of Cardinals, or *Collegium Cardinalium*, details about the motivations that informed the cardinals' choice of pope begin to emerge.

Around the conclave of May 7–8, 2025, rumors were circulating about who the cardinals wanted: a pope who would continue Pope Francis's agenda of promoting synodality and focusing attention on the poor, and someone with the ability to govern, to deal with the financial problems of the Vatican, and to address the crisis brought on by the allegations of sexual abuse.<sup>3</sup> They wanted a well-balanced figure who would be able to create unity and communion in a Church and wider society marked by division.

The person they chose, with support that far exceeded the two-thirds majority required, or a total of eighty-nine or more votes, was the sixty-nine-year-old American Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost.<sup>4</sup> The new pope took the name of Leo XIV in honor of Pope Leo XIII, the author of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which established the social doctrine of the Church that dealt with the challenges of the Industrial Revolution. Thus, the

new pope chose a name that symbolizes courage, leadership, and vigilance.

The day after Prevost's election, in a press conference on May 9, 2025, the American cardinals explained the criteria that led them to vote for him. They based their decision not on his actions, his words, or even his profile but on his *style*. "I think what was important was not the substance of what he said, but the manner with which he said it." stated Cardinal Robert McElroy of Washington. The image of *The Last Judgment* by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, he recounted, was an evocative reminder as he entered the conclave, and it led him to select his candidate carefully. Once Cardinal McElroy entered the chapel, all sense of divisions in the world disappeared. "I felt we were looking at that moment into the souls of one another to find who should carry on this incredibly important mission at this moment in time. I really think in the discernment that went on and in the prayer that went on, we were looking for the soul who has the capacity at this moment to be a really beautiful witness to Christ."<sup>5</sup>

For many present that day, Prevost was a true "citizen of the world," having lived in various countries and being able to speak in different languages. He was a pastor with deep experience and knowledge of many parts of the world due to his many trips in his role as prior general of the Augustinian Order. He was the right person with the right life experience.

The election of the man who would become Leo XIV was not based on extensive political or ideological calculation by the cardinals; rather, it was a spiritual selection based on a common feeling of what the Church needs at this delicate time. The answer was Robert Prevost, an American who became a naturalized Peruvian citizen, with a kind personality and vast experience in many different corners of the world.

***Born in Diversity***

ROBERT PREVOST, OR Rob to his family, was born on September 14, 1955 in Bronzeville, a neighborhood in the south part of Chicago. He was the youngest son of Mildred Agnes Prevost and Louis Marius Prevost and brother to Louis Martin and John Joseph.

His family heritage illustrates the story of an ethnic melting pot. His mother was born in Chicago to a family of mixed Creole heritage from Louisiana, with African, French, and Spanish roots. Mildred's grandmother had been born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. During the years when Mildred was raising her children, she worked as an educator and librarian at Mendel Catholic High School, which was led by the Augustinians and was the school her two older boys attended. This closeness to the order was the first seed of the religious vocation of the future pope.

Pope Leo XIV's father was also born in Chicago and was raised in Hyde Park in the southern part of the city; his heritage was a mix of French and Italian. He served in the Marines during World War II and was the captain of a boat of soldiers that landed on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. Later, he participated in Operation Dragoon in the liberation of southern France. After the war, he dedicated himself to education and became the superintendent of the 167th school district of Brookwood in Glenwood, Illinois.

From a young age, Robert Prevost was surrounded by cultural diversity and educational influences, which contributed to his leadership skills and ability as an administrator.

In 1990, Robert's mother died. Six years later, his father, Louis, sold the family home in Dolton where he had grown up and where he had raised his own family. Only a short year after this, Louis also passed away. Recently the family home has been

remodeled and put back on the market. The real estate agent who has been working with this home has considered the possibility of raising the asking price since the election of Pope Leo.<sup>6</sup> Today the city of Dolton is in the process of negotiating with the owners to buy it and possibly turn it into a museum or historic landmark. If the city is able to procure the property, the plan is to cooperate with the archdiocese to determine its use. As soon as the news broke of the pope's election, police were posted to his former home, where large groups of people went to leave flowers and crosses and take pictures. A new tourist destination and pilgrimage site have been born.

### *A Pious Youth*

BEYOND THE DIVERSITY of his heritage and his educational background, Pope Leo's family was profoundly spiritual, especially his mother, Mildred, who formed her children in the faith. In Dolton, they attended Mass every Sunday, went to Catholic school, received the sacraments, and prayed the Rosary before dinner each evening. It was a traditional Catholic education that would prove to be deeply formative for the family, especially for Rob. His siblings, friends, and teachers remember clearly that these early years of his life were marked by a deep spiritual sensibility and an attraction to the faith that was uncommon for a child of his age. From the beginning, this young boy who would become pope was seen as special, as someone who was close to God.

In the interviews that took place after the election of their "little brother Rob," Louis and John Prevost explained that he always had the desire to go to seminary and join the priesthood. Louis, the eldest of the three, told the press after the conclave, "We knew, I think . . . he [was] going to be a priest . . . while I was out playing boy games, whether it was baseball, cops and

robbers, tag, whatever, kid games, Rob used to like to play priest. Now, how many seven- or eight-year-olds do you know who like to play priest? I don't know very many of them. We'd have to go downstairs while he did Mass for us and do Holy communion with Necco wafers. Since way back then he's had that calling."<sup>7</sup>

John, the pope's other brother, added:

He took our mom's ironing board and put a tablecloth over it, and we had to go to Mass, and we went to Mass and he knew everything, he knew his prayers in Latin, he knew his prayers in English, he did that all the time and he took it totally seriously, he did it all the time, it was not a joke, it was not a game, he was dead serious about it. Isn't that interesting? That's how you knew, and when he was in first grade or kindergarten, one of the moms across the street, and one down street, they said, 'You're going to be the first American pope.' They knew then. He just had that spirit about him that was interested in other people and interested in the neighbors.<sup>8</sup>

According to this brother, Rob was very tranquil, even as a teenager. He liked sports, swimming, and spending time with his brothers and friends. When he was a little older, he liked to drive, something that he will not be doing very often as pontiff. Later, Father Jasson Sempertegui, who was his secretary from 2016 to 2020, when the pope was bishop of Chiclayo, commented on his desire to drive his own car.

Of course he loved to drive. I think it will be one of the things he misses the most. He taught me how to drive, because when he was younger, he was a driving instruc-

tor. It was one of the things that he did to make money while he was at university. . . . He had a lot of stories about driving Cadillacs while he was in Chicago and making a little money to survive his time there. When I was his secretary, he asked me if I knew how to drive, to which I said that I didn't because I was too nervous. And he said to me: "You need to learn." He gave me lessons. We would go to Our Lady of La Paz, and I would be driving with him in the passenger seat with the hand brake in his hand just in case.<sup>9</sup>

Father Jasson also told of Prevost's passion for driving while in Chiclayo when he was a bishop. He remembers a time when they were traveling to the seminary and Bishop Prevost was driving. Sempertegui asked him what he would like to listen to while on their drive, and Prevost pointed to the glove box and took out a disc that he liked to listen to every now and then.

It was music from The Mamas & the Papas, and I asked him, "What is this music?" And he answered, "Well, this is from my time." And then "California Dreamin'" started to play. And then Monsignor Roberto sang the song the whole way. He began to translate the lyrics, and he put on his sunglasses, the ones he was photographed in. He loved to drive and sing. It was there that I saw him as he was, and it was an impressive thing. He was an adventurer who didn't have fear, because he was sure that the grace of God was with him. He enjoyed life.<sup>10</sup>

Returning to his early life, Robert and his brothers grew up in the parish of Saint Mary of the Assumption Church in

Riverdale, where they attended school. It was in this church in the heart of his neighborhood that he sang in the choir and was an acolyte for a time. At one time, the whole Prevost family was involved in volunteering in the life of the church. Today, the old area where the parish once functioned has almost vanished. In 2011, the church merged with another parish, and in 2019, they united with two different churches. The old parish church is now in disrepair, and the city would like to demolish it, but there is an initiative online to save the church and to give it protected status.

While at school, Rob had the reputation of being spiritual and different from the rest. His classmates would say, without exception, that they knew there was something special about Rob, even when he was thirteen years old. John Doughney, who was his classmate and friend in the class of 1969 at Saint Mary's, explained:

When we think of the common characteristics of a thirteen-year-old boy growing up on the South Side of Chicago, certain images come to mind, but the words that you probably wouldn't think about would be *kindness*, *compassion*, *devotion*, and *humility*. Those aren't typically ascribed to young men, certainly not thirteen-year-olds from the South Side of Chicago. That was what typified Robert: He was all of those things, and his classmates knew it. We knew he was different, because he held himself differently than a typical thirteen-year-old boy, and we could tell. . . . Every young man, every boy who grows up in the Catholic Church, has probably at one time or another had visions of being a priest and maybe one day pope, because that is the epitome. I'm sure every one of us did, but Robert, he had a kind of singularity of purpose as he was growing

up, and you could tell this was the path he was taking, and he stayed on that path regardless of what anybody else thought or said.<sup>11</sup>

After finishing primary school, Robert Prevost decided to go into a minor seminary of the Order of Saint Augustine, an educational institution dedicated to forming young men who have an interest in becoming priests but are still at school. From 1969 to 1973, he attended the St. Augustine Seminary High School in Michigan. There he received accolades for his academic work, was regularly on the honor roll, and was the editor in chief of the yearbook for his class. Additionally, he served as secretary for the student government and was a member of the National Honor Society. Prevost was also the captain of the bowling team and led the oratory and debate team, competing in national events. Of all the students in his class, he was one of thirteen who graduated and one of the few who dedicated their lives to the priesthood.

For John Prevost, there was no other option for his brother Rob but the priesthood. The question was: “What order would he be? Would he go to Jesuit, would he go to Franciscan, would he go to Augustinian, or would he be a diocesan priest and be in a local parish? I think that was the only question that was in people’s minds.” And after researching and talking with several priests who visited Robert at home, “he chose the Augustinians and I think he made a good choice.”<sup>12</sup>

In the exclusive interview for this book, Pope Leo XIV said in reference to comments about his early sense of vocation:

All of it is true, but it’s exaggerated. They don’t talk about the times when I wanted to be a truck driver. The man next door, the neighbor where we grew up, he was a truck driver, and he’d come home at times with these

huge semis, and I thought that was cool. Everybody knows I like to drive and have driven vehicles of many shapes and sizes, so that was part of it too. Then my father was a school superintendent. My brother wanted to be a teacher, and I said I want to be the superintendent, those kinds of things. . . . There were times I thought of going into politics, studying law, the possibility of political science and law. There were different times in my life when that was attractive to me in terms of a service vocation as well. Like any kid growing up, I thought of lots of different possibilities, but it is true that from a young age I also had this inkling that I might like to be a priest. My parents were very involved in the local parish. Priests would come over for dinner regularly, both diocesan priests and then later, when my brothers started going to an Augustinian high school, that's where I began to know the Augustinians. The idea of priesthood was also something that I was very aware of, and the comments that were made are true.<sup>13</sup>

With the windows of the Villa Barberini open and with Lake Albano in the background, the pope remembers the neighbor on his street who said he would be the first American pope. He asserts, "It was not just a one-time thing. I don't know how much impact that really had on me at that time. I had forgotten about a lot of that until all this had happened and my older brothers started telling these stories that are true, more or less." "This memory returned to him in the days after the conclave:

The thought of vocation, certainly as I grew into adolescence, was certainly present, [but] not like a one-

time decision and I never thought about it again. There were times, I think for most seminarians, there are times along the way that you get discouraged or that you hit a wall and you think that “This isn’t for me.” There was a time I wanted to have a family and thought, “I don’t need the celibacy thing,” and [wanted to] take another route in life, but here I am. Obviously the Lord’s grace and some perseverance, which is also a gift from the Lord, brought me here.<sup>14</sup>

What drew Robert Prevost to the priesthood? What pushed him in that direction?

I remember early on, the concept of service; saying that to make sense out of your life, do something for others. That was something, with my parents, we were nurtured on. I remember a number of different incidents, some of which were not revealed by my brothers. When we were little kids at Christmas time and we had all gotten our gifts and opened them already, Mom came home and said, “There’s a needy family nearby and they have no gifts for their children. What do you think if we all share something with them?” So, of the gifts we had received – and of course one of mine was a new truck, that was the truck driver stage – it was like, give the truck to the neighbor kid who is not going to get any gifts. There’s a sense of, ‘Share with others what you’ve been given.’ We were brought up like that. . . . I thought of becoming a missionary already as a school-boy. That dimension was also there very early on, because it wasn’t like, “I’m going to stay home and just stay here.” I thought, *No, be adventurous and go somewhere*

*else and give your life in service.* That was also as a boy thinking about my future.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Augustinians and the Path Toward Community***

THE ORDER OF Saint Augustine, which in 2024 numbered 1,804 priests and 2,457 religious brothers, is a mendicant order that was founded in the thirteenth century to live out and promote a spirit of fraternity like in early Christian communities.<sup>16</sup> Mendicant orders distinguish themselves by their commitment to poverty and itinerant preaching, as well as their emphasis on ministry in urban areas. The members live in poverty, travel to various places to preach, and depend on donations and charity for their work. They are known for their active participation in the daily lives of people, especially in cities, with an emphasis on helping their fellow neighbors. Since the beginning, the order has recognized the figure of Saint Augustine of Hippo, from whom they derive their name, as their father and spiritual guide. They adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine for their communal life, doctrine, and spiritual life, working to participate in communal life and to “live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart.”<sup>17</sup> Life in community is foundational for the spirituality and way of the Augustinian life. The Rule also adds, “Call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common.”<sup>18</sup> Given the emphasis on a shared life, it probably does not come as a surprise that in the conclave, the cardinals wanted a pope who could unify a divided society and Church. They desired a leader who could foster communion among its members, and they chose to elect someone whose spiritual formation was based on a vision of harmonious coexistence in community.

Yet why did Robert Prevost choose the Order of Saint Augustine? The decision to follow his path forward with the Augustinians seemed like a natural next step for Robert. His family had

already had connections with them for many years. Mildred, his mother, worked in the library at Mendel Catholic High School, an Augustinian institution where his older brothers had studied. And Pope Leo XIV attributes this choice to two key aspects: its dedication to teaching and its communal character. This is how he explained it at Castel Gandolfo:

One was that they're a teaching order. In the Chicago province, they still run several schools. I liked the idea of teaching—again, my parents were both in education at different points—but they were also missionaries. The community and friendship aspect of Augustinians, which I learned about very early on, were very positive elements, whereas I saw diocesan priests as—even though our home parish was diocesan—they were just a different lifestyle. I thought that the community life of the Augustinians, the friendship aspect, the doing things together, all that made sense to me as a kid. I remember distinctly, I took the entrance exam for Quigley high school seminary one day and the very next day, after that experience of the exam, I said, "I want to go the Augustinians." My parents were very supportive. They said, "You decide and we'll support you." So, I applied to go to the St. Augustine school seminary in Holland, Michigan. Days later, they were calling me from Quigley. I had done fairly well, I guess, on the exam, but they wanted me. They said, "Come here," and I said, "Sorry, I already decided, I'm going [to the Augustinians]," and that was the end of the story at that point. Motivations change and are purified as you grow, but I think these little inklings from very early on were really part of a vocation.<sup>19</sup>

*University Life: Rob, the Outstanding Student*

AFTER GRADUATING FROM St. Augustine Seminary High School in 1973, Robert Prevost had decided to attend Tolentine College in Chicago, but it closed that same year. So instead, he enrolled at Villanova University, an Augustinian institution close to Philadelphia and one of the only Augustinian Catholic colleges in the United States (the other being Merrimack College in Massachusetts). During his studies, he took Hebrew and Latin classes and read the writings of St. Augustine and the German Jesuit priest and theologian Karl Rahner. While at Villanova he worked as a gardener at the Catholic church cemetery of Saint Denis in Havertown, Pennsylvania and, in 1977, he graduated with a bachelor of science in mathematics.

Father William Lego, an Augustinian serving the parish of St. Turibius in Chicago who has known Pope Leo XIV since he was twelve or thirteen years old, attests that Robert was always recognized for his intelligence in his studies. Whether as a child, an adolescent, or an adult, “Studying was easier for him . . . you could tell he was destined for things.” He notes that Prevost was highly regarded for the way he served during seminary events or took care of his older brothers.<sup>20</sup> They studied together at St. Augustine Seminary High School in Michigan and at Villanova, and both attended Catholic Theological Union after entering the Augustinian Order. They were also part of the first class that spent four years at Villanova and later served in the Midwest Augustinian Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, a Marian title for whom the pope holds a deep devotion.

After it was announced that Robert Prevost would be the new pope, the president of Villanova, Father Peter M. Donohue, sent an email to the newly elected pope joking that maybe he could be the graduation speaker for 2026. The pope responded, “Thanks, Peter! I appreciate it, but I am probably going to be

busy!”<sup>21</sup> In interviews after the conclave, Donohue described the pope’s good sense of humor and his ability to listen: “He’s a really good listener, he’s very personable, he enjoys being around people, he’s got a wonderful sense of humor, but he’s not real effusive, he’s not going to get up in front of the crowd and start entertaining them, but he will join in the celebration. He likes to be around people, he enjoys their company . . . and I think that’s what’s going to be really important. He’s a person that really wants to get people together, draw people together.”<sup>22</sup> Donohue explained that in the years after Prevost left the United States, while living in Rome and Peru, he still held close ties to his alma mater and visited Villanova every time he returned to the country.<sup>23</sup>

### *A Contemplative Novice: An Age of Change and Adaptation in the Church*

WHEN ROBERT GRADUATED from Villanova with a degree in mathematics in 1977, he formally joined the Augustinians, entering the novitiate on September 1, 1977, and residing for a year at Immaculate Conception Church in the Gate District of St. Louis, Missouri, before returning to Chicago to study at the Catholic Theological Union.

Barbara Herrmann, a parishioner at the nearby Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in Bellefontaine Neighbors, which also took in Augustinian novices, met Robert while a novice at Immaculate Conception. “I always remember him as the quiet person . . . he was what you see, a very contemplative person,” Herrmann told a local newspaper, also sharing how the novices participated happily in parish life, often playing with kids after Sunday Mass. When she saw Robert as the new pope, she noted that he had not changed much: “The person I remember is the person you see: a gentle, nice, kind person.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Father William Lego, during the year of their novitiate, Robert was very spiritual, basing himself more in prayer and contemplation of God than in pastoral work:

You were centered on trying to get to know God in your life. So even though we lived in an inner-city parish in St. Louis, we did some stuff, but not what you would think of; working with the poor, (that was) very minimal. . . . Our novice master actually said to us, 'You will be doing pastoral ministry the rest of your lives if you stay, and at times you're going to be torn apart and not knowing what you're doing. I'm going to teach you contemplation and meditation and how to settle yourself so you stay in contact with God in your life.' So that was the core of our novitiate. You can see that in the Pope, that he's very prayerful. We all had that view, with that charisma, with that grace.<sup>25</sup>

Upon completing his year as a novice, Robert took temporary vows in the Order of Saint Augustine on September 2, 1978, after which he returned to Chicago to enroll at Catholic Theological Union, where he would study to become a priest. There he took courses in theology, Holy Scripture, and more. While he was studying, he taught physics and mathematics at St. Rita of Cascia High School in the Chicago neighborhood of Wrightwood.

At that time, it had just been a decade since the end of the Second Vatican Council, which had been inaugurated by Pope John XXIII in 1962 and brought to a close by Pope Paul VI in 1965. The Council's main goal had been to adapt the Catholic Church to the modern world, and it emphasized the need, among other things, to strengthen relationships with Christian denomi-

nations as well as with non-Christians. Another goal of the Council was to promote a more active participation of the laity in local parish ministry—something that would be especially important in Prevost’s ministry in Peru. Among the most controversial reforms of the Council were its revisions to the liturgy, which encouraged priests to celebrate the Mass facing the congregation instead of facing away from them and toward the altar. It also encouraged priests to celebrate the Mass in the local language instead of Latin. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the need to strengthen the relationship between the clergy and laity and introduced various changes to religious life, asking those in holy orders to adapt and evolve while maintaining the essence of their respective traditions. Regarding the liturgical reform, religious communities that have a strong liturgical tradition at their core, such as the Dominicans or the Augustinians, were able to weather the storms of the conciliar reforms with more ease.

This period of history influenced Prevost’s view of ecclesial life. The Second Vatican Council and its reforms were discussed in great depth in the classrooms at Catholic Theological Union and shaped the conversation around key issues. It was in this context of change and reform that Robert underwent his theological and priestly formation.

At the university during this time, Father William Lego says the debate was extensive and that many students, including seminarians, had very interesting discussions, covering even the topic of women and ordination.

At a school of theology, one of the benefits is that you are able to discuss and express opinions on all issues, even those that are contrary to church teachings. At this time, there was a strong group of women who were challenging the church teaching that only males can be

ordained as deacons and priests. This made for some really good discussions in our classes and among us outside of the classroom. These discussions have, for me, helped me to be open to consider all aspects of Church Teachings. That doesn't mean that I will deny them as a Priest.<sup>26</sup>

During the years that Robert studied at Catholic Theological Union, from 1978 to 1981, there were about twenty-five male Augustinian communities. Sister Dianne Bergant, who spoke with the media after the conclave, recounted her time as a professor at Union for over forty years. The school was called that because various religious communities had closed their own seminaries, and the institution had truly become a "theological union" of different Catholic communities. Among them were the Augustinians, who had a large presence there.<sup>27</sup>

Sister Dianne remembers having the young Prevost in her Old Testament class and her class on the Pentateuch in his first year, 1978–1979. She spoke about the intelligence Robert displayed in her classes: "He was a very serious student." She says she still has the exams and grades of all her students, "so when I say he was a good student, I've got evidence! . . . He was a very good student, he was an 'A' student, and he was always on time, which means he's reliable, a quiet person, not withdrawn."<sup>28</sup>

The majority of students at Catholic Theological Union were candidates for ordination, and many of them belonged to a religious order, which created a strong sense of community. Sister Dianne explained, "You studied together, you prayed together, we had parties together, students, faculty, and staff. There was really a good sense of community in those years, and he was part of it. If he wasn't, I would have remembered. You remember the ones who don't participate, and he did."<sup>29</sup>

Unlike most Augustinian students at the time, Robert took a different path after graduating. Instead of being sent to a parish in the United States, he was one of the few to go overseas. Sister Dianne says that she stayed in touch with Robert after his graduation and that he was always kind and warm. Even at that time, he had the right disposition for the office of pope, she recounts, spending twenty years among the poor abroad and being so committed to his vocation that he became a citizen of another country. Sister Dianne explains, “You don’t turn that off . . . and that he names himself after Leo XIII, who was the champion of the working class. He’s not the type that will start a fight, but he’s not the type that will run away from it. He will take a stand, and he will call the church to join him in taking the stand.”<sup>30</sup>

In a similar fashion, Sister Thérèse DelGenio, who was also his professor when he was studying at Catholic Theological Union, told the press that Robert Prevost often took the most difficult tasks in his ministry, such as working with those suffering from addiction. Instead of taking easier jobs available for students at schools or parishes, he decided to work at the parish of St. Victor with a team of lay workers. “These people were trained to learn about drug addiction, alcoholism, and the suffering of the addict as well as the family,” said Sister Thérèse. She added, “They saw his sense of community because of his belonging to the Augustinian community. He is not just local and concerned about the United States; he has a global heart and global vision.”<sup>31</sup>

### ***Ordination, the Angelicum, and His Beginnings in Peru***

AFTER GRADUATING FROM the Union with a master of divinity in 1981, Robert made a solemn profession with the Augustinians on August 29 of that same year and was ordained a deacon on September 10 by Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, the auxiliary of

Detroit and a controversial figure for his liberal positions, at St. Clare of Montefalco parish in Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan.

Prevost was ordained a priest nine months after his diaconal ordination, on June 19, 1982, at Santa Monica degli Agostiniani, a small chapel that is part of the headquarters of the Augustinians near the Vatican. There he was ordained by Archbishop Jean Jadot, a Belgian prelate who had been chosen as the apostolic delegate to the United States between 1973 and 1980. Jadot was known for forming a generation of center-left bishops with a social conscience in the United States, which was seen as an implementation of the reforms coming out of the Second Vatican Council.

Recognized for his talent and intellectual abilities, Robert was sent almost immediately to study canon law at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas—also known as the Angelicum—where he received a licentiate of canon law in 1984 and a doctorate in canon law in 1987.

After finishing his studies in canon law in Rome, Robert was sent for the first time to Peru in 1985 as a chancellor to assist the Augustinian John Conway McNabb, the prelate and later bishop of Chulucanas. It was in this role that he set the foundation for the prelature to become a diocese, which happened three years later in 1988. In 1986, he returned to the United States to defend his doctoral thesis and to serve as the director of vocation and mission for the Midwest Augustinian Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, a position he would hold for two years. During this time, he also worked as the temporary director of the Provincial Office of Missions and as a faculty member of the Augustinian Novitiate in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, before returning to Peru. In 1988, Robert began his long ministry in that Andean nation.

According to his friend and Augustinian brother William

Lego, there are three things that make up Augustinian spirituality and that defined Robert in his missionary work, traits he hopes will continue to mark his leadership as the pope: communal life, a life of prayer, and a commitment to social justice. Yet the most important trait, he says, is a life of community: “We are called to live as brothers, sharing our faith at all levels, and calling all people to communion. I think this is going to be his distinctive mark.”<sup>32</sup>

### *Deep Roots in Community That Can Shape a Papacy*

THIS SENSE OF community has already been established as a defining hallmark of the papacy of Leo XIV. Days after his election on May 8, 2025, the new pope made a surprise visit to the Augustinian headquarters in Rome, just a few steps from the Vatican. There he celebrated Mass and had lunch with his brothers, as he often did when he was a cardinal. On May 16, he had a private audience with the prior general of the Augustinians, the Spanish Father Alejandro Moral. Pope Leo XIV even attended Father Moral’s seventieth birthday lunch two weeks later, on June 1. At that time, the Augustinian pope returned to celebrate with the friars of his congregation at the headquarters of the order, St. Monica’s International College.

It is clear that the bond Prevost has to the Augustinian Order continues to be strong. His sense of community, and even his need for it, is more and more evident. While this is a trait of Augustinians, Robert began cultivating this sense at home within his own family. This was his first experience of community, especially in his childhood with Louis Martin and John Joseph, who, as shown by their interviews with the media, have an immense sense of pride in their younger brother. They have also demonstrated a love and care that only they, as his older brothers, could have for little Robert.

Louis Prevost expressed to various media sources that his family was very happy with Robert's election—in fact, they “were elated, overjoyed, and super happy.” Yet this feeling was mixed with a sense of distance since they had not been able to hear from him. The fear was that this position would draw him away from the family:

Is this position going to take him away like we can't see him anymore, we can't talk to him anymore the way we used to anymore, we don't know. It's a new life. He's not Rob anymore, he's Leo XIV. Does that mean as his brothers we're outsiders now, because he's on top of the church and he's got more important things to do than family? I don't know, I sincerely hope not. . . . I'll still treat him like my little brother, I'll give him a hug and say Rob, you idiot, what have you done? Take his hat off and give him a noogie!<sup>33</sup>

With a growing concern for the relationship that he may have moving forward with his brother, who is now the pope, Louis admitted that the feeling of the first days, before speaking to Robert, was like “when you die and your life flashes before your eyes.” Louis recounted that what went through his head were the moments from Rob's birth to this moment of being on the throne of Peter. But he expressed the deep joy that his family feels and said with great emotion, “I think he'll be a great pope going forward, my guess is one of the best the church has seen in our lifetimes for sure.” But mixed with the pride and enthusiasm, a sadness sneaks in: “Reality sets in that maybe I've lost my baby brother to the church, he's out of touch, I can't get ahold of him, but I think by Saturday we managed to touch base, briefly. But it's going to be a new world, for both of us. . . . That's probably

the worst thing about it. I'm standing here all day and I'm wondering if I'll ever get to see him again, and be with him, and shake his hand and hug him."<sup>34</sup>

Louis also related that the announcement of Rob as the new pope made him well up with tears, thinking about the closeness they had as brothers. When he finally heard his brother's voice on the balcony of the Vatican, he felt more at ease but then thought to himself, with tears, "Maybe internal jealousy that 'They took my brother away', because we used to talk once or twice a week on the phone. That's not going to happen anymore, I've got to prepare myself for that. When you lose that regular communication, to take that away at our age . . . we'd contact each other once a week just to be sure we're all still okay and breathing and kicking. Now it'll take somebody like you in the media to tell me "Oh, the pope is not well," because I may not find out until after it's reported in the news at the rate the communication is going, so it's going to be a big change in our family connections for sure."<sup>35</sup>

Louis, the oldest of the Prevost brothers and a supporter of American president Donald J. Trump and the political movement MAGA (Make America Great Again), expressed a protective approach to his younger brother, stating that he will probably tone down his public presence and activism on social media so as to not harm his brother's reputation. "This could be trouble for us and some of the things I've said could reflect back on him." About his posts, in which he sometimes used crude and vulgar language toward certain politicians, he explained:

I posted it, and I wouldn't have posted it if I didn't sort of believe it, but I didn't know what was coming was coming so soon, and I can tell you that since then I've been very quiet, biting my tongue at some of the stuff

that is out there on social media, because I don't want to create waves that don't need to be there, because I'm a MAGA type and I have my beliefs, I don't need to create heat for him, he's going to have enough as it is without the press going, the pope's brother says this! Going forward, I've realized now that I see some of this coming back at me, I should probably tone it down. I've backed off a lot of media, and I don't see myself really getting too much involved in that at least, and especially until I've had a chance to talk to my brother and see what he thinks.<sup>36</sup>

The pope's other brother, John, has also shared his pride and joy, as well as a concern for the pressure and responsibility now on Rob. In hearing the news, he felt "shock, disbelief, a whole lot of pride, a whole lot of, is this for real?"

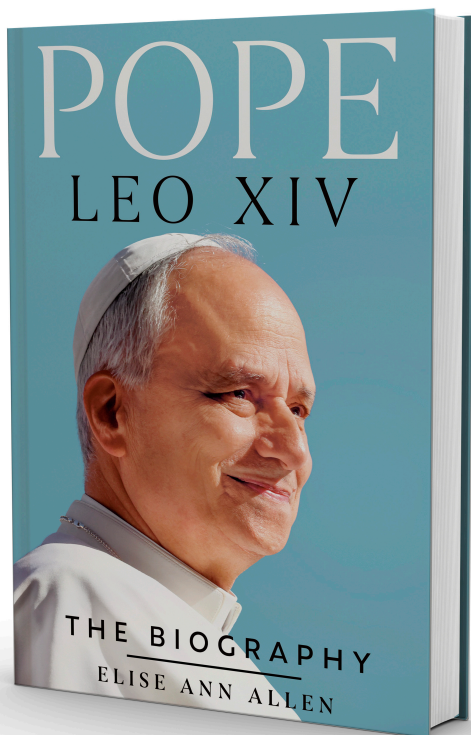
It's hard to put into words. I mean, how can one be more proud of someone who is not only the pope but the first American pope, the first pope from Chicago, and my brother? It's awesome. But I think it is going to carry a great responsibility. I think he will be scrutinized left and right, up and down because he is the first American pope. You know, we're used to an Italian pope or, in one case, an Argentine pope, but here's the American pope. "What's he going to do for me?" you know people will ask, which is why I thought there would never be an American pope because the United States is too powerful already. Would they want to bring the Church into it? But the Holy Spirit moved somebody.<sup>37</sup>

John expressed his absolute confidence that his brother will step up to this challenge, especially in such a polarized world. “He has the patience of ‘a saint.’ He can handle it, he can take it, he can stop and think before he gives an answer. He will think about it, and he will be very careful about it, and what’s the best response for the church today, and for the people of the church, and to try and bring them all into one, which is probably an impossible task.”<sup>38</sup> He also explained that he believes Robert will be a good pope because “In his heart, in his very soul, he wanted to be a missionary. He didn’t want the bishop, he didn’t want the cardinal, but that’s what he was asked to do, so that’s what he did. He would have liked to go back to Peru and work with the missions, because he had a deep feeling for the disenfranchised, for the poor, for those who were not listened to.”<sup>39</sup> In addition to this, John firmly believes that Leo XIV will follow the path that was started by his Argentine predecessor: “I think he’ll be a second Pope Francis, I think he’ll follow right in his footsteps, working for the underprivileged.”<sup>40</sup>

John also expressed his desire to help people who are seeking faith and hope in his brother, the pope. He said that many people have already started to send him letters asking for help or seeking a miracle. He believes the motivation behind these letters is faith. “If we don’t have faith, we’re lost. So, if it’s helping people’s faith, this is a good thing.”<sup>41</sup> And for John, who is aware of what it means to have a direct line to the pope, it is important to answer those letters he has been receiving: “I’ll go through them and see if there’s some answer I can give. I don’t want to just throw them in the garbage; people poured out their souls here, so I want to give them something back.”<sup>42</sup>

When a cardinal is elected pope, his life changes completely, including a new name and even a new identity. This event alters

not only his life but also the lives of those closest to him. That is why the main concern for the pope's brothers is not simply their being related to the pope, one of the most important people on earth, but rather the daily closeness they have with their brother. The questions emerging from this momentous change have to do with the impact it will have on their relationship with their brother and how he will stand up to the enormous personal, spiritual, and historic challenge: Will they get to see him? How will they know if he is healthy? Will they be able to be there for him? And even, will they be able to continue to play Wordle together as they used to?<sup>43</sup> They are concerned about not only the new responsibilities but also the scrutiny he will face. They also feel the need to protect him with their words and actions, even sharing in the ministry by answering those who are seeking contact with the pope in their desire to hold on to hope. They want to be close to their brother, be a protection to him, and, by extension, be part of his closeness to the world.



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