LEO XIV: "THE FIRST AMERICAN POPE"

A Talk '67 Event: with **Fr. Gregory Waldrop, SJ, '84, PhD**; Associate Chaplain, Saint Thomas More Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale

KEY FACTS ABOUT ROBERT PREVOST

- Born September 14, 1955, on the South Side of Chicago
- Youngest of three sons of a WWII veteran who became a school superintendent and a librarian and teacher
- Italian, French, Spanish, and Louisiana mixed-race Creole heritage
- Practicing Catholic family very active in their parish; he and his brothers attended daily Mass; “Rob” was an altar boy, went to Catholic schools

The Class of ‘67 knows the world he grew up in. He’s a religious.

- Aspired to the priesthood early; attended an Augustinian seminary high school
- Honor roll, yearbook editor, bowling team captain
- Attended Villanova University, majored in mathematics
- After graduating in 1977, joined the Augustinians; ordained a priest in 1982
- Provincial in 1999; OSA Prior General 2001-2013

Fr. Robert Prevost, OSA, in 1982

WHAT MAKES LEO LEO?

All-American background

Family's devout but otherwise unexceptional Catholic faith

Deep Augustinian formation as a religious, a priest, and a thinker

Experience in Peru as a missionary (1985-86, 1988-99) and later as a bishop (2014-2023)

Two terms as the superior general of the world-wide Augustinian order

WHAT MADE ROBERT PREVOST POPE?

All of those other things

Temperament (measured, reserved, calm, patient, analytical, humble, warm, a listener)

Timing (Pope Francis)

International experience ("the least American of the Americans")

Big job in the Roman Curia–Prefect of the Dicastery of Bishops

"PEACE BE WITH ALL OF YOU!"

MAY 8, 2025

Elected on the fourth ballot

Wrote and read inaugural greeting from loggia of St. Peter's

Choir dress of Supreme Pontiff: white cassock, zucchetto, and rochet; red mozzetta and papal stole; gold pectoral cross

First word: "Peace"—"unarmed and disarming"

Next: "courageous" Pope Francis; "synodal church"

"A son of St. Augustine"

"Missionary church" dedicated to gospel, peace, justice

Repeated themes: "building bridges," "dialog," "peace"

Next day…explained choice of name and spoke of AI

WHAT DOES POPE LEO CARE ABOUT?

Ad Extra

Unity

Humanity

Peace

AI

Migrants

GOSPEL

Ad Intra

Unity

Synodality

Missionary church

Young people

Pastoral process

DEFINING CHARACTER OF HIS PAPACY THUS FAR

Clear-eyed perspective on issues and problems

Measured, process-oriented, calm, consultative approach

Decisive, fearless, even blunt response

HOW SIGNIFICANT IS IT THAT HE'S AN AMERICAN?

Significant—obviously historic—but not why he was elected

Says he feels "fully American"…but also part Peruvian

Direct manner, managerial efficiency, tech- and media- savvy

Latin American pastoral sense: poor, indigenous, migrants

"Gets" anti—American bias; not easy to dismiss as "foreign"

CONTINUITY WITH POPE FRANCIS?

Substance, yes; style, no

Poor, migrants, climate, liturgy, Vatican II, LGBTQ, women

Different personalities

Greater collegiality, more formal, “a cooler head”

Consolidation rather than expansion of reform

A BRIDGE BETWEEN TRADS & "RADS"

HAND EXTENDED TO TRADITIONALISTS

Ok'd Latin Mass at Altar of the Chair w/Cardinal Burke

Instructed French bishops to work with TLM folks

Grants dispensations to *Traditionis custodes*

Synodality as process, not vehicle for doctrinal change

Hasn't advanced women deacons

HAND EXTENDED TO REFORMISTS

Pleaded with SSPX, then excommunicated them

Retains *Traditionis custodes* and *Fiducia supplicans*

Centrality of synodality

Women prefects of dicasteries

Unity of Church "should not revolve around sexual matters"

LEO IN A PERIOD OF AMERICAN POLARIZATION

April 7, 2026: Pope calls President's threat to Iran ("a whole civilization will die tonight"), "truly unacceptable"

April 12: Trump blasts Pope as "WEAK on crime and terrible for foreign policy" and later said "I'm not a fan of Pope Leo;" next day, Vance said Pope should stay out of American political affairs

April 13: Pope said, "I have no fear of the Trump administration;" next day, Vance advised the Pope to "be careful" when talking about theology

Not an outsider

Positions cut across political lines

Influence lies in contrast of his words and manner

NAVIGATING CULTURE WARS

World isn't the United States

Doesn't bundle issues per Fox or MSNBC

Open to dialog, firm on teaching

Pastoral rather than doctrinal

GLOBAL INFLUENCE

<u>State of Vatican City</u>

108 acres

GDP: $19 million

Armed Forces: 135 Swiss Guards

Population: 506

Diplomatic relations with 184 states

<u>Catholic Church</u>

1.4 billion people around the world

Convening, moral framing, multi-literalism, back-channel diplomacy→global megaphone

Little power, but world leaders take his calls

Q&A

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION AMERICANS HAVE ABOUT WHAT LEO XIV—OR ANY POPE—CAN DO OR ACCOMPLISH?

FIVE YEARS FROM NOW, WHAT DO YOU HOPE POPE LEO WILL HAVE ACCOMPLISHED? WHAT WOULD HAVE MADE HIS PAPACY “CONSEQUENTIAL”?

MOST OF US HAVE LIVED THROUGH THE PAPACIES OF PIUS XII, JOHN XXIII, PAUL VI, JOHN PAUL I, JOHN PAUL II, BENEDICT XVI, AND FRANCIS. FROM THAT HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, WHAT MIGHT EVENTUALLY MAKE THE PAPACY OF LEO XIV DISTINCTIVE–AND WHAT MIGHT WE BE MISSING ABOUT THIS MOMENT BY LIVING THROUGH IT RATHER THAN LOOKING BACK ON IT?