

**Homily for Thursday of the 4th Week of Easter
Bishops' Plan Insurance Company Annual Meeting
Augustine Institute
Florissant, Missouri**

May 15, 2025

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good for us to be here at this Mass for the Annual Meeting of the Bishops' Plan Insurance Company at this beautiful facility which is now the new location for the Augustine Institute. It is providential that we are here at an institution named after Saint Augustine just one week after the election of our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, who has spent most of his life as a member of the Augustinian community.

People throughout the world are rejoicing at the election of Pope Leo XIV, especially here in his home state of Illinois. Since he and I both grew up on the south side of Chicago, many people have been asking me if I know him. The answer is no, since he lived in the south suburbs and I lived on the near southwest side of the city. Although we both became priests, our vocational paths went in different directions, as I became a diocesan priest serving in the Archdiocese of Chicago, while he entered the Augustinian

community and served most of his years of ministry in South America as a missionary in Peru.

Robert Francis Prevost was born on September 14, 1955, in Chicago and raised in the nearby suburb of Dolton. His parents were Louis Marius Prevost, an educator, and Mildred Martínez, a librarian. Robert also has two brothers, Louis Martin Prevost and John Joseph Prevost. The Prevost family were members of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish on the far south side of Chicago. The family participated as musicians, altar boys, and lectors.¹

At the age of fourteen, he entered St. Augustine Seminary High School in Holland, Michigan, graduating in 1973. From there Prevost enrolled in Villanova University near Philadelphia, earning a bachelor's degree in mathematics in 1977. That same year he began his novitiate in the Augustinian order and took his solemn vows four years later. He was ordained a priest in 1982.

Prevost studied at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and received a master's in divinity in 1982. He then headed to Rome to study canon law at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas. He earned a license in canon law in 1984. His doctoral thesis was on the role of the local prior in the Augustinian order.

In 1985 Father Prevost began missionary work with the Augustinians in Peru. He returned to Chicago in 1999 to serve as prior of his community. He was then elected prior general of the entire Augustinian order in 2001, during which time he lived in Rome. In 2015 Pope Francis appointed Prevost Bishop of the Diocese of Chiclayo in Peru.

Prevost was appointed prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops in January 2023, responsible for recommending candidates for appointment as bishop by the Pope. Later that year he was made a Cardinal by Pope Francis.²

At the beginning of a new pontificate, people wonder what the agenda of the new Pope might be. We get some clues from his first words from the *loggia* or balcony of St. Peter's Basilica after being introduced as the new Pope, taking the name of Leo XIV. In his remarks to the City of Rome and to the World, Pope Leo XIV said, "Peace be with you all! Dear brothers and sisters, these are the first words spoken by the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for God's flock. I would like this greeting of peace to resound in your hearts, in your families, among all people, wherever they may be, in every nation and throughout the world. Peace be with you! It is the peace of the risen Christ. A peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering. A peace that comes from God, the God

who loves us all, unconditionally.” He then added, “I am an Augustinian, a son of Saint Augustine, who once said, ‘With you I am a Christian, and for you I am a bishop.’ In this sense, all of us can journey together toward the homeland that God has prepared for us.”³

In his homily at his first Eucharistic Celebration as Pontiff with the College of Cardinals, Pope Leo said, “Even today, there are many settings in which the Christian faith is considered absurd, meant for the weak and unintelligent. Settings where other securities are preferred, like technology, money, success, power, or pleasure. ... Today, too, there are many settings in which Jesus, although appreciated as a man, is reduced to a kind of charismatic leader or superman. This is true not only among non-believers but also among many baptized Christians, who thus end up living, at this level, in a state of practical atheism. This is the world that has been entrusted to us, a world in which, as Pope Francis taught us so many times, we are called to bear witness to our joyful faith in Jesus the Saviour. Therefore, it is essential that we too repeat, with Peter: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (*Mt 16:16*). It is essential to do this, first of all, in our personal relationship with the Lord, in our commitment to a daily journey of

conversion. Then, to do so as a Church, experiencing together our fidelity to the Lord and bringing the Good News to all (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1)."⁴

We can also take a clue from the new Pope's choice of the name Leo, which in Latin means "Lion." We can expect, then, that Pope Leo XIV will be bold in his proclamation of the Gospel.

The first Pope to choose the name Leo was a great Pope, in fact, he is still called Pope St. Leo the Great. We have a stained glass window of Pope St. Leo the Great in our Cathedral in Springfield. The third window on the north wall of depicts Pope St. Leo the Great confronting Attila the Hun, who had invaded Italy and was heading for Rome. Without any soldiers or military weapons, Pope St. Leo the Great met Attila outside the City of Rome and dissuaded him from attacking.

Pope St. Leo the Great is also known for his profound theological writings. When I was a doing my graduate studies in Latin in Rome, I was impressed by the eloquence of Pope St. Leo the Great's Latin prose. I also noticed that Pope Leo XIV spoke impeccable Latin in the Mass that he celebrated with the College of Cardinals.

The most recent Pope to bear the name Leo was Pope Leo XIII, who reigned as Pope from 1878 to 1903. He is perhaps best known for publishing

the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, considered the foundational document for the church's social teaching. The document emphasized the dignity of workers.⁵ He also encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Mary.⁶ The Rosary was the subject of 12 encyclicals and five apostolic letters of Pope Leo XIII. Beginning in 1883 and concluding in 1898, an encyclical on the Rosary appeared almost every year, usually in preparation for the month of October.⁷

Pope Leo XIII also composed the Prayer to St. Michael that we recite after Mass. Many historians say that Pope Leo had a profound vision while celebrating Mass. A Cardinal at the time explained that "Pope Leo XIII truly had a vision of demonic spirits, who were gathering on the Eternal City (Rome). From that experience ... comes the prayer which he wanted the whole Church to recite."⁸

These are just a few indicators of what we might expect during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV. Let us pray that the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV may inspire people to a more fervent practice of the Catholic faith and a deeper relationship with the Lord.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <https://www.biography.com/religious-figures/a64716495/pope-leo-xiv>.

² <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leo-XIV>.

³ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/05/08/250508a.html>

⁴ <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2025/05/09/250509d.html>

⁵ <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2025/05/08/who-was-pope-leo-xiii-xiv-new-250637>

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leo-XIII>

⁷ <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=558>

⁸ <https://aleteia.org/2017/09/25/the-demonic-vision-that-inspired-the-st-michael-prayer>