His Excellency,
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Diocese of Belleville

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 11, 2025, 10:00 AM Mass
Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, Waterloo

(This is the text as originally written. During the actual delivery, some passages were omitted and other comments were added spontaneously. *Nota bene*: This text has not been thoroughly proofread. Therefore, there may be errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.)

"My Sheep Hear My Voice."
His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV Listening to the Voice of Jesus



Handout photo: Ernesto Benavides/Chiclayo Diocese, via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Then Bishop Prevost visiting members of his Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

This morning Jesus tells us: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me"(John 10:27). Are you and I listening to His voice today as we continue to meditate on the mystery of the Resurrection? Are our families listening to His voice on this Good Shepherd Sunday as we pray for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life?

Robert heard the voice of the Good Shephard as a child when he felt called to the priesthood and when he accepted many ministries during his life as an Augustinian friar and bishop. An American by birth but, in fact, a citizen of the world, he spent a third of his life in the United States, a third, as an Augustinian missionary in Peru, and a third in Rome serving in the Vatican. As a naturalized citizen of Peru, Robert is both Peruvian and American. "Chiclayo," his diocese in Peru, and "Chicago," his native city, almost sound alike. His ministry as Cardinal Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Bishops since 2023, made him well known to many cardinal electors as *papabile*.

When Robert, whose name honors St. Robert Bellarmine, SJ, heard that same voice in a unique way during the conclave in the Sistine Chapel on Thursday, the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii, he knew the Good Shepherd was telling him "follow me" to the Chair of Peter as Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church and servant leader of the world's 1.4 billion Catholics.

With his first words from the central *loggia* of the Basilica of St. Peter, "Peace be with all of you," he invited you and me, the entire Catholic world and all people of good will to hear the voice of Jesus Christ in a fresh new way and to follow Him in our daily lives with renewed energy, dedication, and confidence knowing that Jesus tells us no one can take us out of His hand.

Yet, when you heard the words *"Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus Papam:"* Robert Francis Cardinal Prevost who has chosen the name Leo XIV, you may have said, "I never heard of him. Who is He?" The first question that I was asked is: "Do you know him?" While I have met him three times and I knew that he, like me, was born on the South Side of Chicago, I cannot say I know the man who is now the first pope born in the Americas, and the first to come from an English-speaking country since Pope Adrian IV in the 12th century.

The second question that I was asked is: "Why is he Leo XIV and not Francis II?" To answer that question, you need to know who Leo XIII was since Cardinal Prevost clearly admired him enough to take his name. Pope Leo XIII, whose pontificate lasted from 1878 to 1903 (dying at 93), was a strong defender of Catholic doctrine and an ardent promotor of the theology of the brilliant St. Thomas Aquinas. He also expressed concern about what he called "Americanism," a certain Catholic spirit he saw in the United States. However, Leo XIII is mainly known for his bold new ideas concerning the plight of the poor and the working class. He might be called the father of modern Catholic teaching on social issues, detailed in his landmark 1891 encyclical "*Rerum Novarum*," "On the Condition of the Working Classes" or "Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor," which criticized both laissez-faire capitalism and state-centric socialism. This letter has influenced the Catholic

Church's application of the teachings of Jesus Christ to social and political issues ever since. Leo XIII's pioneering document provided Catholics and the world moral guidance concerning the dignity and intrinsic value of every human person, capitalism vs socialism, and the right to private property. Lamenting the enormous fortunes of some few individuals and the utter poverty of the masses, he vigorously defended the rights of the working class, including the right of workers to decent working conditions, a just wage, labor unions, and the right to go on strike. At the time it seemed almost revolutionary for the pope to be espousing these views because he was firmly placing the Catholic Church on the side of the poor and of working people at a critical moment in the history of the labor movement.

Perhaps in choosing the name Leo XIV, rather that Francis II, the 69-year-old new pontiff was indicating that, while he shares Pope Francis' preferential option for the poor, and the marginalized as well as for migrants seeking to escape political and economic strife in their home countries, he was bringing his own vision to his global ministry as the 267th successor of St. Peter as Bishop of Rome.

Pope Leo XIV's first words from the central *loggia* of St. Peter's to the throngs of the Christiaan Faithful amassed in the Piazza San Pietro were the words of the risen Christ to the Apostles, "Peace be with you." "My dear brothers and sisters, this is the first greeting of the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for God's flock." He prayed that Christ's peace would enter people's hearts, their families and the whole earth. The new Pope said "the peace of the risen Lord, is a peace that is unarmed and disarming. Since God loves all of us unconditionally, the Church must be open to everyone. We are all in God's hands so "without fear, united, hand in hand with God and with each other, let us go forward together being missionary disciples of Christ. Together we must try to be a missionary Church, a synodal Church, a Church that builds bridges and always dialogues, that is always open to receiving everyone." He then quoted the famous words of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, "With you I am a Christian and for you I am a bishop."

His words were building on what he said in May 2023, "The lack of unity is a wound that the Church suffers, a very painful one. Divisions and polemics in the Church do not help anything. We bishops especially must accelerate the movement toward unity, toward communion in the Church."

The decision of the College of Cardinals to elect Leo contradicted the long-held belief that the Catholic Church would never elect a pope from the United States because of the enormous influence our country has on world affairs.

Those who know our new Holy Father well suggest that, while he shares Pope Francis' concerns for those most in need and the need to care for the Earth, Leo XIV's style may be less outspoken. His manner is laidback, reserved, circumspect, discrete, joyful, and humble. He even washes his own dishes after community meals. This does not mean he will be shy about challenging all of us to listen to the voice of Jesus and follow Him even when the cost

of discipleship may be great. He has shown that he will not hesitate to speak out on the truth of the gospel after prayerfully listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd in the Word of God. Some political leaders and others have already criticized the pope's past statements affirming the Church's teachings on war, immigration, racial prejudice, gun control, human sexuality, marriage, climate change, and other issues. He has bluntly stated that those who suggest that Jesus taught us to love others based on how close they are to us personally are wrong. Christ's command to love our neighbors as ourselves in the parable of the Good Samaritan makes it clear that everyone is our neighbor!

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ: Let us pray together on this Good Shepherd Sunday that many of our young people, inspired by Leo XIV, may consider serving the Church in ordained and consecrated ministries. Please join me in praying for this gifted multilingual man steeped in mathematics, physics, Canon Law, and the theology of the Second Vatican Council, and a profound love of Sacred Scripture. Pray for this gifted man who wisely told the cardinals who elected him that artificial intelligence is one of the most critical matters facing humanity. Pray for this gifted man who assumes the Petrine ministry in this secular age which, in many places, all but dismisses the Christian faith. Pray for this gifted man who is now, unexpectedly, our pontifex, our bridgebuilder in an extraordinary way for the Church in the United States weakened, at times, by quarrels and division. Pray for this gifted man to whom we look with hope that he will lead us to a deeper understanding of Jesus' words, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

Robert Francis Prevost, now Leo XIV, the man from Chicago and Chiclayo has retained his pontifical motto from Peru, *"In Illo uno unum,"* words of St. Augustine, "<u>although we Christians are many, in the one Christ we are one.</u>" Knowing his great devotion to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, I urge you to pray the rosary for this gifted man every day. Pray that, as His Holiness celebrates the Pontifical Mass on Sunday, May 18 marking the Solemn Inauguration of his Pontificate, he may be filled with the abundant gifts Holy Spirit.
He has been prepared well for the great work to which he has been called.

Now he is the hope of the Church!

Praised be Jesus Christ. Both now and forever. AMEN!