



A PASTORAL LETTER

On Welcoming Pope Leo XIV with Great Joy

To be read at all Masses on the Fourth Sunday of Easter

11th May 2025

My dear brothers and sisters,

On Thursday, an outburst of joy marked the announcement that we have a new Pope. This joy was known before we even knew the name or had glimpsed the kindly face of Pope Leo XIV. It was the announcement that we had a Pope that was the source of this joy. The man chosen was still unseen, and undoubtedly conscious as never before, of his human weakness and the immense weight of the mission suddenly entrusted to him as the 266th Successor of the Apostle Peter. The new Pope would first lead us in prayer by greeting the Holy Mother of God and asking her to pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. This struck me as a beautiful expression of our Catholic faith in the office of the Pope, whoever the man happens to be, and in the mission entrusted by Christ to Peter and his successors until the end of time. It is in this faith that we welcome Pope Leo XIV. For it was Christ who made Peter the rock of His Church, gave him the keys of the Kingdom,ⁱ called him to strengthen His brethrenⁱⁱ and to feed the sheep and lambs of His flock, as a witness to His love^{iii iv}.

It seemed significant that before we caught sight of our new Pope, we saw first the Cross of Christ carried onto the balcony of Saint Peter's. For the Pope always stands before the world as a witness to Christ and to the victory of His Cross. In his first words and greeting "Peace be with you all", Pope Leo consciously echoed the words of the Risen Jesus and reminded us "*We are disciples of Christ, Christ goes before us, and the world needs His light*" for in His love we find the assurance that evil will not prevail.

Following a previous papal election, I was asked at a petrol station whether I 'liked' the new Pope. This is a strange question for a Catholic, akin to being asked whether you 'like' your father or mother! The Pope is not a celebrity, a politician nor a public personality whose popularity may grow or fade. The place of the Pope in the family of the Church is always seen in the light of faith, whoever the man happens to be, for he has taken the place of Peter for us.

We pray for the Pope with a loyalty and affection which transcends all human ‘likes’ or ‘dislikes.’ We might even pray, as one faithful soul did, that the Pope gets a good night’s rest, conscious of the burden he bears. It is with such faith, loyalty and human affection that we welcome Pope Leo XIV, our thirteenth Holy Father since his predecessor Pope Pius IX founded the Shrewsbury Diocese in 1851.

A still wider perspective is offered in the Cathedral this Sunday, when our Greek Orthodox brothers and sisters bring an icon and relic of Pope Saint Sylvester I, in celebration of the Creed we profess each Sunday. If you don’t recognise his name, this was the Pope at the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 AD, when the bishops first gathered to make the great profession of the Church’s faith that we echo together at Mass each Sunday. It is the enduring mission of Peter and his successors to keep this faith and strengthen us in faith by serving as “the visible source and foundation of unity”^v. In celebrating the 1700th Anniversary of the Creed of Nicea and remembering the saintly Pope of that distant time, we are reminded of the long continuity of the mission of Saint Peter, which continues with the fourteenth Pope Leo in our time.

The World Day of Prayer for Vocations celebrated on this Good Shepherd Sunday, also leads us to remember that a young man, *Robert Prevost*, was first ready to dedicate his whole life to Christ in the Catholic Priesthood. Today, as we pray for this young man as our Pope, let us also pray for many new and generous vocations to the Priesthood that are a source of joy for the whole Church. It is because of Robert Prevost’s generous and faithful response to his calling, that we are now able to receive “with great joy” Pope Leo XIV as a holy father for us all.

United with you in this joy and in this prayer,

+ *Mark*

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Mt. 16: 18 -19

ⁱⁱ Lk. 22:32

ⁱⁱⁱ Jn. 21: 15-17

^{iv} Cf. Pope Saint John Paul II "The Ministry of Love" 17th October 1978

^v Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 552