"In the 1990s, as I was serving as pastoral associate at St. Mary of the Assumption parish on the very southern tip of Chicago, I had no idea the parish was home to a future pope. I knew the Prevost family and was aware that Fr. Rob was doing missionary work in Peru. There, he was forging lifelong friendships with many people, including Armando Jesús Lovera Vásquez who has now provided us with this powerful, personal, and profound glimpse into the man who is now Pope Leo XIV. *From Robert to Pope Leo* will not only introduce you to the friendship between Padre Roberto and Armando but will also inspire you to a deeper friendship with Jesus Christ."

—**Joe Paprocki, DMin**, is a master catechist, author, and speaker, recently retired after forty-five years of service in full-time ministry.

From Robert to Pope Leo

Our Friendship, His Mission

Armando Jesús Lovera Vásquez



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On September 4, 2025, I informed the Holy Father that this book was nearing publication. I asked him if he might be willing to write a few introductory words. He responded with the serenity of one who holds what is essential in his memory:

"Use what I said at the Youth Jubilee Vigil: '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. . . . 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.'"[1]

Then he added: "You're a good friend."

[1] Pope Leo XIV, "Dialogue Between His Holiness Pope Leo XIV and Young People During the Jubilee Vigil," August 2, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2025/august/documents/20250802-veglia-tor-vergata.html.

To the Prevost family:
Within their bosom, in the experiences of everyday life,
he encountered God.
There his vocation took root.

To the Order of St. Augustine:
In its cloisters that vocation took shape,
the brother and friend who seeks God in community
in oneness of mind and heart.

To the people of Peru:
They welcomed him
as a friend, companion, priest, and bishop,
and together made a church.

To the Augustinians of Spain:
Upon hearing the call of Pope Leo XIII,
they ventured into the northern jungle of Peru,
Gospel in hand. Patience on foot.

To all the friends of Robert Prevost:
In his words and gestures we have recognized,
time and again, the face of the Friend who never fails: Jesus.

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Foreword

History remembers few names, and it forgets that what is truly decisive is woven by many hands. Included in that background is friendship—rarely the protagonist, always the foundation. It sustains us in our weariness, accompanies us in our silences, and reminds us that no one walks entirely alone.

That often-invisible thread is woven into every great life. This was the case with Clare and Francis of Assisi, Anne of St. Bartholomew and Teresa of Avila. Also with Augustine and Nebridius, who were fellow students and insatiable seekers of truth. In that relationship, Augustine sensed what he would later call a "oneness of mind and heart"—individual paths that intertwined to form a single story, the seed of his mature vision of friendship and community.

Armando Lovera and Robert Prevost met in 1991. Armando had been warned, "He's American and a canon lawyer." With that in mind, he expected Robert to be distant, solemn, and carrying the formal air of an academic. Instead, he found warmth, fluent Spanish, and a disarming friendliness built on his family background, deep pastoral experience, and love of Peru. That afternoon, a friendship was born: Robert became simply Roberto, or Padre Roberto.

May 8, 2025

6:15 p.m.

The WhatsApp group chat for the SJDigital department at Grupo de Comunicación Loyola is active. The white smoke had appeared.

"Habemus papam?"

Armando: "Habemus . . . but we don't know who . . ."

"Habemus, but 'no sabemus.'"[1]

Armando again: "Syllogism . . . If it's not me, it's someone else."

6:36 p.m.

The wait continues.

Armando writes: "Waiting and welcoming . . ."

7:14 p.m.

The announcement arrives.

"Leo XIV?"

Me: "American. Prevost. Fantastic, I think."

"69 years old . . ."

Armando didn't take long to respond: "He's my soul friend!"

At the end of 1998, Robert traveled to Chicago to participate in the chapter of his Augustinian province. Armando accompanied him from Trujillo to Lima, feeling like this farewell might be unlike previous ones. He was right. In Chicago, Robert was elected prior provincial, which meant leaving Peru and returning to live and work in his hometown.

Then came Rome, Chiclayo, the dicastery, the cardinalate, and finally, May 8, 2025. After the death of Francis and the beginning of the conclave, Armando was struck by another intuition.

I've shared hours of conversation with Armando. The farewell between these friends in Peru in 1998 was pivotal, because from that point on, they walked different paths, sometimes parallel, sometimes intersecting. But beneath the surface, the bond remained strong. It's what St. Augustine calls friendship of the soul: a union that overcomes distance and time because it is rooted in

[1] The responder here was being playful with Latin and Spanish. Replying to the traditional "*Habemus papam*" ("We have a pope"), which had been offered in the chat in the form of a question, this responder replied with the Latin "*Habemus*" ("We have [one]") and then melded the Spanish verb *saber* and Latin's third-person plural ending to make a rhyme, saying, "But we don't know" who it is.—Trans.

God. There, friendship expands; there are no longer two but three. God isn't looking in from the outside; he is the center, where the paths meet.

Lived in this way, friendship doesn't depend on the frequency of encounters but on the ultimate orientation of life. Every gesture and every word is embedded in that communion, with God as its witness, guarantor, and source. That's why, for Augustine, true friendship isn't ended by distance or death; it remains alive and fruitful in God.

This book is intended as a tribute to that friendship. It also illuminates the journey from a son of St. Augustine to successor of St. Peter, from Robert Prevost to Leo XIV. In these pages, friendship is a thread that runs through everything and intertwines on various levels. There is Armando's friendship with Robert, forged over the years they shared and summarized in that brief and precise phrase that Armando used in the WhatsApp chat on the day of Robert's election: "my soul friend." There is Robert's friendship with so many men and women who have shaped his life, from Chicago and the humble communities of Chulucanas, Trujillo, and Chiclayo, to the Augustinian friars in different countries and his colleagues in the Roman Curia, each leaving a mark that has sustained and molded him. There is also Robert Prevost's friendship with Francis, the Jesuit pope who recognized in him a close brother, someone with whom he could share trust and camaraderie amidst the burdens of the church.

Above all is the friendship of Jesus the Christ: the one that gives substance to the others and explains how an American Augustinian with a Peruvian heart became a universal shepherd. Jesus sowed true friendships in Robert, friendships that nurtured him and encouraged God's work within him. Alongside this shines his love for Mary, Our Mother of Good Counsel, a faithful friend in his vocation, to whom he entrusts every step.

This book you hold in your hands will come to an end on its last page, but the friendship that inspired it will continue to live. For that, I give thanks. To Armando for sharing the blessing of his friendship with Pope Leo XIV, for writing, sifting through memories, listening, and accepting advice—for opening up to me a friendship that is both very personal and yet so universal. Thank

you to Nathalie, who supported Armando with love and patience on this journey, and to little Jimena and Nathalie, whose mere presence has constantly reminded him that life always moves forward. And thanks, of course, to the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, for the trust with which he encouraged this project conceived by one of his soul friends.

In the end, it all comes down to recognizing that the story of a pope is also written with the names of those who accompany him.

Without Spirit-driven friends, neither Robert nor Pope Leo would be who they are today.

Íñigo Ybarra Morell
Limpias (Cantabria), Spain
August 28, 2025
Feast of St. Augustine

1

"Accepto"

The first name echoed in the Sistine Chapel.

Under the backdrop of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*, the count began: one hundred and thirty-three ballots. It was the fourth voting session of the conclave, the decisive one, on the afternoon of May 8, 2025.

Before the altar, the three scrutineers carried out their task with precision. The first unfolded the ballot and recorded the name. The second confirmed that the record was accurate. The third announced it so that everyone could follow the count. Then he pierced the ballot with a needle and threaded it onto a string that would connect them all—a tangible sign that none would be lost, that everything was bound together in a single will.

From the first votes, his name began to stand out. Eighteen. . . . Fifty-five. . . . If it weren't for the voice of the scrutineer, you would have heard the accelerated heartbeats and the restrained breath.

In the first voting session, on the previous day, he was already among the three cardinals with the greatest amount of the support.

The third session, that morning, strengthened his lead, leaving him just one vote shy of the required number. And so, as the bus transported the electors to the Sistine Chapel for the fourth voting session, the Mexican Cardinal Francisco Robles Ortega, seated beside him, said, "I think I am traveling with you on your final journey as a cardinal."

"Whatever is God's will," he replied calmly.

At seventy-three votes, certainty hung in the air. The tension among the gathering grew; joy pulsed underneath it, ready to find expression.

Eighty-five. The revered Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re's prediction was about to come true. "This afternoon," he had said, "we will meet the new pope."

Eighty-nine was the threshold.

The decisive vote was read. Upon hearing the first syllable of his name, some stood up; others searched out his face. The silence, heavy until then, was broken by applause.

He remained seated. Someone took his arm and helped him to his feet.

Days later, Filipino Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David described that moment: "All of us shed tears." Argentine Cardinal Ángel Sixto Rossi recalled, "It was an experience of joy, a kind of very strong consolation, more than one would imagine."

The vote count continued, and support grew. When it approached one hundred, Cardinal Pietro Parolin asked those who had stood to take their seats.

In his seat, Cardinal Robert Prevost remained motionless. Like Elijah in the cave, he seemed to hear the whisper of the Spirit that had led him there more than the din that surrounded him (1 Kings 19:9-13).

In the days prior, he had limited himself to keeping in mind what was essential: the conclave was a time for prayer and discernment.

What did this man feel at that moment? Perhaps even he wouldn't be able to explain it in words.

Inside, he felt the weight of the mission entrusted to him and at the same time a deep peace, the kind that comes when you accept what the Lord gives: "Give what you command, and then command whatever you will."[1]

Amidst so many gazes from the cardinals around him, he perceived a close and familiar face, and in the rhythmic repetition of his surname—"Prevost . . . Prevost . . . Prevost"—he recognized the voice of Jesus, his friend.

[1] St. Augustine, The *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New City Press, 1997), X, 29, 40.

He recalled the moment, on the shore of Tiberias, when the Nazarene looked at the fisherman and asked him for the third time, "Peter, do you love me?" That was how he experienced the call.

And then, like Peter, he answered from the most innermost and highest part of his being,[2] from that most secret and sacred core where a person sits alone with God[3]: "Lord, you know that I love you."

Looking at his brother cardinals, he heard the summons: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

It was a silent dialogue with the Word. He had learned it as a young man from St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*: speaking with God from deep within yourself, searching within until you find him.

The Word spoke, and Robert put himself at its disposal.

He sighed.

Beside him, Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle sensed his tension. He reached into his pocket beneath his cassock pocket and, with a discreet gesture, asked, "Do you want one?"

Robert nodded. It was a piece of candy.

He took it and breathed a sigh of relief.

He was not alone. Those who had chosen him for this new mission were with him.

Soon, the vote-counting ended. For a few seconds, no one moved. Everything seemed to stand still.

"He received well over a hundred votes," the Malagasy Cardinal Désiré Tsarahazana would later comment. And French Cardinal Jean-Paul Vesco said, "He has the entire College of Cardinals behind him."

Some, bowing their heads, thanked the Holy Spirit for guiding them and allowing them to accomplish their task in such a short time.[4]

[2] See St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, III, 6, 11.

[3] See Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 16.

[4] Cardinal Luis José Rueda Aparicio, the archbishop of Bogotá, said, "We are happy; the Holy Spirit has guided us." Similarly, Cardinal Arlindo Gomes Furtado,

The designated cardinal approached the chosen one and asked him the question: *"Acceptasne electionem de te canonice factam in Summum Pontificem?"* ("Do you accept your canonical election as Supreme Pontiff?").

Cardinal Prevost looked up.

At that moment, perhaps there passed through his mind the faces of people he'd loved, the places where he served, the memories of a life of service, from that of an altar boy to the episcopal chair.

As a child, he'd seen his parents pray the rosary every day for the intentions of the pope.[5] Now those prayers, alive in his memory, burned in his heart. He lowered his eyes. Love overwhelmed him.

He looked at the cardinal who was asking him the question. He took a deep breath. He uttered the answer he had already given to the Lord within himself: *"Accepto"* ("I accept").

All of the cardinals stood. Applause erupted.

The manager asked for silence. There was one more question: "*Quo nomine vis vocari?*" ("By what name do you wish to be called?").

"*Vocabor Leo*" ("I will be called Leo.").

The name was enough; Leo XIII came immediately to the minds of those around him. He would be Leo XIV.

And thus began his pontificate.

One of the scrutineers lit the fireplace. The ballots, bound together on the single string, were thrown into the fire; they burned together, and the will of the conclave was sealed in the embers. Meanwhile, the newly elected pope was led to the Hall of Tears.

Minutes later, the signal outside.

Over the roof of the Sistine Chapel, a column of white smoke rose.

---

the bishop of Santiago, Cape Verde, declared, "The Holy Spirit chooses, the electors confirm."

[5] In 1879, Pope Leo XIII began including a monthly intention of the pope within the mission of the Apostleship of Prayer (now called the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network). Pope Leo's parents prayed for this monthly intention every day, just before going to bed.

The bells of St. Peter's and of churches throughout Rome rang out with jubilation, announcing the good news: *Habemus papam*.

The square was buzzing. Through alleyways and avenues, crowds hurried toward it.

An old woman prayed a rosary with trembling fingers. A father lifted his daughter onto his shoulders so she could see better. Priests and bishops, aflame with the same desire, waited in silence.

The gaze of everyone was directed upwards, to the empty central balcony of the basilica, where soon the successor of St. Peter would have a name and a face.

The children of the church came to meet him. Without even knowing him, they already followed his path.

One who awaits the Shepherd already walks with him.[6]

[6] Archbishop Luis Javier Argüello García of Valladolid, the president of the Spanish episcopal conference since March 2024, declared upon the election of Leo XIV: "The Spanish Church rejoices in an extraordinary way to welcome this new pope who has served as bishop in Peru and who has worked alongside Pope Francis in the Dicastery for Bishops. . . . Let us welcome with joy and gratitude this new gift that the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon us through the College of Cardinals, and let us live out the call he has given us to proclaim Jesus Christ and to live in communion, together, as a pilgrim people, what Pope Francis had already begun. . . . May the Lord bless Leo XIV. May the Virgin Mary watch over him and intercede for him and for the entire Church."

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, offered this statement: "In communion with Catholics around the world, the bishops of the United States offer prayers of thanksgiving for the election of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV. . . . We rejoice that a son of this Nation has been chosen by the cardinals, but we recognize that he now belongs to all Catholics and to all people of good will. His words advocating peace, unity, and missionary activity already indicate a path forward. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, we also pray that the Holy Father, as the successor of St. Peter, will enjoy serenity in his ministry and be a watchful and wise shepherd who will confirm us in our faith and fill the world with the hope inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

The message from the bishops of Peru on the occasion of the election of Pope Leo XIV: "The bishops of Peru, with profound joy and gratitude,

share with all the people of Peru the immense joy at the appointment of Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, His Holiness Leo XIV, as the new universal pastor of the Church. The Holy Father knows our land intimately: from the hot sands of our coasts, the indomitable strength of our highlands, and the verdant heart of our Amazon. During his evangelizing journey through Peru, he strengthened the faith with his message, attentive to the needs of the humble, with his wise and prudent words that educated in the search for truth, with his affable closeness to all, believers and strangers alike, always moved by love for Jesus Christ. In this Jubilee of Hope, we feel blessed by the Lord. We give thanks to God for having chosen a man whose human, spiritual, and pastoral virtues are truly great. We have had the privilege of knowing firsthand his life's testimony and his service to the most humble. . . . We raise our prayers to the Lord that He may grant him a fruitful and luminous pontificate, guided by the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. May his ministry be a source of unity, hope, and renewal for all humanity. . . . May the Lord of Miracles and the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Our Mother, St. Rose of Lima and St. Martin de Porres, always accompany him in this high and holy mission in service to the Church and to humanity."

Finally, the Augustinian order commented: "[The Order of St. Augustine] wishes to express to Pope Leo XIV its warmest and most affectionate congratulations, invoking abundant graces from the Lord upon him and upon his magisterium, graces upon graces that extend over the whole of the Church and over all humanity. These wishes are also intended as an expression of gratitude for the fatherly care and passion with which he has guided the order as prior general for twelve years (from 2001 to 2013) and for his faithful and consistent witness of consecration and ministry, lived in the light of the charism and teachings of St. Augustine. Reiterating with enthusiasm the firm communion with the Holy Father on the part of all the religious of our beloved order, the prior general renews the commitment of the Augustinians to serve the Church in his mission. We assure him of our constant prayers for him and for the Petrine magisterium, and we entrust ourselves to his paternal blessing. May the Virgin Mary, whom we venerate today with the sweet title of 'Divine Grace,' St. Augustine, St. Monica, and all the saints and blessed of the order protect and sustain his ministry as successor of the Apostle Peter and encourage the Church to walk together in faith and with courage."

2

"I Trust You"

Friendship is genuine only when you bind fast together people who cleave to you through . . . charity.

— St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, IV, 4, 7

Never before had a papal succession affected me so deeply. I read, listened, and watched the news avidly. I wasn't looking for facts but for a sign.

Prior to the beginning of the conclave, before Robert was cut off from communication, I rushed to message him: "How are you?"

I had decided not to mention what I'd been hearing.

"Okay. . . . Calm," he replied with his characteristic serenity.

I, on the other hand, was not. His name was beginning to appear more frequently in the media, in the predictions about who would be the next pope. Some highlighted his experience as a missionary, a pastor, and a leader. Others called him a "bridge builder," capable of restoring what was broken. They said his record in Peru made him unique among the American cardinals.

"Do you know that you're about to experience a historic moment?"

"I am aware. Let's pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the cardinals and that they will elect the pope that the church needs."

"Some journalists say you're a potential pope," I ventured, breaking my resolve not to say it.

"Well, they're not well informed," he replied ironically.

Within the Order of St. Augustine, there were those who dared to imagine it. On the website of the Augustinians of Spain, Father Miguel Ángel Martín Juárez, who was secretary general of the curia while Robert Prevost served as prior general for twelve years, took note of the hints in the press and wrote bluntly, "Why don't we dream a little?"[1]

Reading this reminded me of a conversation between friends that I considered surreal at the time. Today it seems prophetic.

It was 2021. Two Augustinian friends, both priests,[2] told me with great conviction, "Padre Roberto is going to be the next pope."

I considered their words to be a simple expression of admiration for the man who had trained them. But on the eve of the conclave, the conversation returned to my memory forcefully, and

[1] Fr. Miguel Angel wrote:

> I have been asked to write a few lines about the participation of our brother Robert Prevost in the upcoming conclave, to be held starting next Wednesday, May 7. I do so based on my friendship and the great affection I have for Roberto, with whom I lived for twelve years in the curia general (2001–2013), when I was secretary general. . . .
>
> Cardinal Prevost is calm, reserved, discreet, balanced, and hard-working. It is said that "while Francis immediately says what he thinks, he [Prevost] pauses for a moment to think it through." . . .
>
> And so, given these qualities, it is not surprising that several media outlets have mentioned him as one of the "papabiles" in the upcoming conclave. One need only cite the articles that appeared on the Vatican's official website, *Vatican News*, on April 22, the day after the death of Pope Francis; in the *National Catholic Reporter*, on April 30; and in the *New York Times*, on May 2. And also in other newspapers and media outlets. In any case, we already know the value of these predictions. And given all this, I say, why not dream a little . . . ? ("Cardenal Robert F. Prevost, OSA, un agustino entra en el conclave," May 7, 2025, https://agustinos.es/cardenal-robert-f-prevost-osa-un-agustino-entra-en-el-conclave/)

[2] One of them was very pious and charismatic, the other quite the opposite, more liberal. The friendship that fosters unity in diversity is one of the characteristics of Augustinian spirituality.

my friends no longer seemed so naive. Their words unsettled me, and I sensed—without any specific reason—that their fulfillment was imminent.

Adding to my unease was reappearance of the old accusations of a cover-up that had been leveled against him when he was bishop of Chiclayo. They were false, yes, but they were also persistent,[3] and now even more so,[4] as if someone were trying to undermine his chances of being elected.

I told him, "And the usual suspects keep insisting on accusations of a cover-up."[5]

"Yes, that's a shame," he replied. "And if they think I have any chance, they're misinformed, too."

From his replies, I could tell that he was at peace, serene.

"I will do what you say," I said. "I will pray that the Holy Spirit will guide the cardinals. And I will pray for you as well."

[3] The program *Cuarto Poder* aired a report on September 8, 2024, titled "Former Bishop of Chiclayo Kept Silent About Cases of Sexual Abuse." On September 10, the Office of Social Communications of the Diocese of Chiclayo published a statement denying the program's accusation. The statement can be read at https://es.zenit.org/2024/09/12/asi-contesta-la-iglesia-las-falsas-acusaciones-contra-cardenal-prevost/.

[4] One of those websites was *InfoVaticana*, which on May 3 published "The Prevost Report Revealed" (https://infovaticana.com/2025/05/03/el-informe prevost-al-descubierto-publicamos-integramente-la-causa-contra-el-prefecto-de-obispos/). On May 6, Jaime Gurpegui described Prevost thus: "Yesterday we saw the portrait of the defeated candidate, a man frustrated because the shadows of his past have come to light and, with them, his aspirations to the papacy are crumbling" (https://infovaticana.com/2025/05/06/prevost-no-desmiente-las-acusaciones-de-encubrimiento-y-lamenta-que-se-haya-publicado-informacion-de-la-doctrina-de-la-fe/). I've been struck by the change of stance they made after the election: "We at InfoVaticana have decided not to insist on that past since he was elected pope, out of respect for his office and so as not to hinder his mission" (https://infovaticana.com/2025/06/14/amenaza-herejes-papa/).

[5] The Peruvian Cardinal Pedro Ricardo Barreto Jimeno, SJ, who is archbishop emeritus of Huancayo, upon noticing this, wrote to him, "Please, Robert, don't be discouraged."

I kept to myself what I sensed. I said nothing about it to him. It wasn't the first time something had come before me in my soul.

May 8, 2025

6:10 p.m.

We got home and needed to leave soon for our sports practices, my daughters for swimming and me for padel. Suddenly, a notification appeared on my phone: "Vatican: white smoke."

After the black smoke had appeared at midday, I thought the conclave would drag on. But I remembered what journalist Nelson Castro had said: "Keep an eye on a cardinal whose name begins with *P*, but it's not Parolin."[6]

My mind completed the rest: it was Robert.

I pulled up the *Vatican News* broadcast on my phone.

7:00 p.m.

We arrived at the Huerta del Rey sports center in Valladolid. I left my phone with my daughters.

"Jey, Nat, when they open the balcony doors, let me know."

I went into the padel court. Waiting near the fence, they watched the broadcast. Not much happened.

Then: "Dad, they're opening the door!"

I ran over to them.

The cardinal protodeacon, Dominique Mamberti, pronounced the first name, "*Robertum*," and I felt a blade pierce my soul. Then I heard "Franciscum," and I had no doubt: it was him.

He had chosen to call himself Leo XIV.

I knelt down. The tears fell, slowly. I covered my face with my hands. I thought about him. His gaze, his voice, his smile. His "knowing" how to be and how to be with others.

[6] I began following Nelson Castro's coverage because of his close relationship with Pope Francis. His reports, published while the conclave was still underway, surprised and worried me. See https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Cx3bniAwmBY and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp3-0b7AGCs.

In the SJDigital office group chat, the topic was the new pope. Moved, I could only write, "He is my soul friend."

My girls screamed and jumped, as if their team had won a World Cup. "Padre Roberto is the pope! Padre Roberto is the pope!"

Still shaken, I asked them to lower their voices, not to make a scene. Luckily, there weren't many people around.

Then he emerged on the balcony and looked out at the world with that peaceful smile, his eyes filled with a brightness that bordered on tears.

I took the girls to the pool, just in time for their lessons. I texted my wife: "Roberto is the new pope." I went back to the padel court, trying to settle myself, but I couldn't.

Between lobs and smashes, I understood: It wasn't *his* desire that had brought him there, but that of Another. And a phrase I had learned as a child came to mind: "My weight is my love, and wherever I am carried, it is this weight that carries me."[7]

An easy ball came my way. I prepared my shot and smashed it hard; something inside me needed to be released. I clenched my fist, holding back the emotion. And in that small gesture, I thanked God: for his life, for his vocation, for the friendship that bound us. For everything I couldn't express but was burning within me.

And then, without realizing it, I was praying the Hail Mary in Latin.

8:30 p.m.

My phone didn't stop vibrating: calls, texts, notifications. In the midst of all that noise, I answered the call from my youngest daughter's godmother.

"Is that our Padre Roberto?" she asked excitedly.

I said yes. She and her family had met him on the day of my daughter's baptism in 2019, and she felt blessed. So did I. Having a papa is wonderful . . . even more so if he's a dear friend.

We said goodbye. It was a brief conversation, interrupted by unknown numbers that kept appearing on my screen.

[7] St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, XIII, 7, 8.

A photo from my album began circulating on social media. Who had posted it? It could only have been someone close to me. I looked at it for a few seconds and turned off my phone.

9:00 p.m.

My wife got home. We embraced. That gesture was enough to bring a conversation from last Sunday back to us.

I'd felt out of place that day, agitated inside. Everything seemed fine, but I wandered aimlessly around the house—opening and closing doors, sitting down and standing up, going out onto the terrace then coming back inside. My eyes filled with tears.

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

I hesitated. I didn't know where to begin. I felt a vague ache inside.

"I have a feeling he will be the new pope."

"And is that a bad thing?"

"No," I replied, after a long pause. "It would be a blessing for the church."

And then I was quiet. I let the silence speak for me.

How could I explain that some blessings come with pain? That the common good is built upon the silent altar of personal sacrifices? He would leave behind his daily life as a cardinal to embrace the demands of being the Supreme Pontiff of the church. He would have to give up many of the simple things that brought him joy: getting to know people personally, spending time with friends to share life with one another, playing tennis, driving, traveling freely.

"If it happens, many things will change," I managed to say. "He won't be able to come home, to stay with us. And I don't know if we'll be able to go see him." We'd been planning to meet him in Rome at the end of July; we had the tickets. It was a trip we'd been postponing since September 2023. We had wanted to be there when Pope Francis created him a cardinal, but he'd encouraged us to come later, because he'd have very little time to spend with us, since the synod meeting was scheduled to begin right after the ceremony.

I was afraid that, with his new ministry, we wouldn't be able to have our long phone calls, where we talked about a little bit

of everything: the Gospel, justice, family, friends, a soccer match, or some shared joke. Not because of any lack of affection, but because of his new mission.

Sensing this, she told me, "Don't worry about what hasn't happened yet. Trust. He is our friend." Now that Robert was the successor of St. Peter . . . she couldn't hold back her tears.

"My dear," I told her, "we need to thank God for him. We have to pray a lot. And be, as always, at God's service."

10:00 p.m.

I sent him a message: "Good evening, Holy Father. We are praying for you. We always do. Now more than ever. May God continue to bless you. You can count on us."

The new name felt heavy. Calling him anything other than Roberto, or Padre Roberto, felt strange. But "Holy Father" was the only way I could address him.

10:50 p.m.

"Thank you! A hug!"

In his brief reply, I felt his warmth and affection. He was still attentive to his friends. I was sure he had many official messages to respond to and much to figure out about his new ministry.

We'd met in 1991 and have been friends ever since.

May 16, 2025

The days passed with a mixture of dizziness, joy, and contemplation.

Some colleagues at work knew we were friends. In 2007, when he was prior general, I'd invited him to visit the offices of Ediciones Mensajero in Bilbao, where I worked. There, he met the director of the publishing house, the Jesuit priest Ángel Pérez Gómez. Now the Grupo de Comunicación Loyola asked me to write something about him.

I was honored by the proposal, but I couldn't accept it without my friend's consent. I had already said no to requests from other media outlets, but since it was the Jesuits, I had to think about it.