Westminster Information

Issue 190
May 2025

As you know I have spent these last weeks in Rome attending the funeral of our beloved Pope Francis and the election of his successor, Pope Leo XIV. Many people have asked me what it was like being in the Conclave. For me, it was an intense experience of the working of the Holy Spirit. So, what can we learn from that?

First, an awareness of the prayers of the entire Church. An intense focus of prayer. A proclamation of a *sensus fidei*, and of the nature and importance of this decision. It was peaceful. There was no clamour. There was attentiveness to each other. It was a precious space of peace and very prayerful. And by prayerful, I mean the atmosphere in which we lived, the simple ways in which we greeted each other. It was a prayerfulness to which everybody contributed. There weren't too many formal prayers, but being prayerful is a disposition, not necessarily an activity. The third quality was fraternity - an essential quality that needs to be present if we are to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. There was no rancour or competitiveness. No harsh words, no denigration of one another, and no expressions of ambition. There was a shared knowledge that the decision, the prize, was a Cross - a death to self and a most intense self-sacrifice into service. That we all knew, and prayed for the one to whom it would be given.

We chose a son of St Augustine, and I was just a few yards from Cardinal Prevost when he was asked, 'Do you accept?' And with utter calmness, he said, 'I accept'. As a son of Augustine, his life and theology has been marked by it being 'affective'. Theology springing from the heart, from Augustine's conversion experience. A theology, a life, a preaching, centred on an awareness of the restlessness of the human heart until it finds rest in God. A way of life in Augustinian communities which has, as its principle, belonging to one another. He will show us again and again that the very core of our journey lies in our relationship with Christ Jesus, in love, in gratitude, and in joy. Without that, everything else counts for little. Pope Leo described the Conclave as a Paschal experience, lived in the light of Christ, to whom we wish to stay close, wanting above all to let His life shine in our world. So let us pray for Pope Leo XIV, as he leads this humble flock to the joys of heaven, where the Brave Shepherd has gone before.

+ Vincent Nichols

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