



## ‘Habemus Papam!’ Diocese reacts to news of first pope from U.S.

**By Pamela Seal**  
**Diocese of Lake Charles**  
LAKE CHARLES — Surprised. Overjoyed. Excited. Thrilled. These are just a few words that come to mind for Catholics in the Diocese of Lake Charles when they learned that United States native Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was chosen as the 267th pope to lead the universal Church.

Taking the name Leo XIV, Cardinal Prevost was elected on May 8, 2025, following the death of Pope Francis on April 21. White smoke rose from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel at 6:09 p.m. Rome time to cheers of faithful pilgrims in St. Peter’s Square as well as those watching around the world.

The day after this historic event, His Excellency Bishop Glen John Provost offered a *Mass of Thanksgiving* at

noon on Friday, May 9, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

Concelebrating with him were Very Rev. Ruben J. Buller, V.G., Pastor of the Cathedral; and Very Rev. Keith Pellerin, V.F., Pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church in Jennings. Very Rev. Joseph Caraway, Chancellor, served as Master of Ceremonies.

Bishop Provost set the record straight for anyone thinking he is leaving for the Eternal City anytime soon.

“One of Father Pellerin’s parishioners called him upon hearing the news of Cardinal Prevost being elected to the papacy expressing surprise that the Bishop of Lake Charles was going to be the pope,” Bishop Provost quipped. “There is a similarity with the spelling of our last names, but Prevost

is a more antique spelling,” drawing laughter from the congregation.

During his homily, Bishop Provost expressed gratitude to Almighty God for the election of Cardinal Prevost to the office of Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ, and Successor of St. Peter.

“He is an extraordinary choice for the Church at this moment in Her history,” he said, remarking that the 69-year-old pope is the fourteenth pontiff choosing the name Leo.

“In doing so, the new Holy Father reached back into history to the reign of the last pope with that name. Leo XIII had one of the longest reigns of any pope since St. Peter,” the bishop remarked. “Every pope reflects a different aspect of the Office of St. Peter, and the selection of a name gives some indication of what is important to the pontiff who selects it.”

Sharing a bit of background on Pope Leo XIV, Bishop Provost made note that he is a native of Chicago, of French, Spanish, and Italian ancestry, and has connections to Louisiana as his maternal grandparents were from New Orleans. He is an Augustinian friar and spent most of his priesthood in the missions of Peru.

The Holy Father’s lineage was not lost on Debra Richard, a parishioner of St. Henry Catholic Church, in attendance at the Mass of Thanksgiving.

“I am excited that Pope Leo is from the United States and has roots in Louisiana. It is beautiful to witness,” she said. “I have heard how humble he is and how close he was to Pope Francis, who was my favorite. I never thought there would be a pope from North America in my lifetime.”

Bishop Provost noted that Pope Leo XIV, during his



**Bishop Glen John Provost presents his homily to those in attendance at the Friday, May 9, Mass of Thanksgiving offered in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception for His Holiness Pope Leo XIV.**

first address from the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica, asked the pilgrims present in the square to join him in praying the Hail Mary.

“This was a significant entrusting of his Pontificate and the Church to the intercession of our Mother Mary,” said the bishop.

Dr. David and Catherine Landry, parishioners of the Cathedral, attended the Mass with their five children, ages 14 to 5.

“We have been praying the rosary daily as a family hoping we could have a Marian pope,” Catherine expressed. “We were overjoyed and truly inspired by the Holy Father entrusting the Church to Our Lady. We felt the choice of this pope was a personal answer to our prayers.”

Julius Garrett Caraway III, a member of St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Lacassine, and father to Very Rev. Joseph Caraway, said he did not have any inside information on who would be the next pope.

“Since my son is a priest, some of my friends were asking me who was going to be elected to the papacy. I told them I didn’t know but I bet my last dollar it was not going

to be an American pope,” he laughed. “I am excited that he can speak to us in our native language. It sounds like we have a good guy, so let’s pray for him.”

Kimberlee Gazzolo, Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Lake Charles, who shared the Mass with some of her staff and principals, commented on hearing the news of the new pontiff.

“It was an exciting day, as our staff and our students watched in anticipation for the newly elected pope to enter the balcony at St. Peter’s Basilica,” Gazzolo stated. “Imagine our surprise as we learned it was Cardinal Robert Prevost, born in Chicago! We are excited for the papacy of Pope Leo XIV. Our Catholic schools will pray for the Holy Father as he takes on his new role.”

Cathedral parishioners Preston and Joanie St. Romain were excited about the choice of Pope Leo XIV.

“I did not know anything about him, but I am very happy with the selection of Pope Leo,” said Preston. “I am excited to learn that he is an intellectual and tends to be more on the conservative side.”

Also from the Cathedral,

Vincent Lupo watched the news unfold live on EWTN and was thrilled with the cardinals’ choice.

“I thought the selection was brilliant because Pope Leo knows a lot about the world from Peru all the way to Italy. I was happy to hear that he was a missionary in Peru for many years, so he is familiar with South America, which has a lot of problems,” Lupo said.

Jackie Baff, a parishioner of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Sulphur, watched history in the making with a group of Altar Society members.

“We were surprised that someone born in the United States was elected to the papacy. At the same time, it is exciting that he has ties to Louisiana,” Baff said. “We are living in trying times, so this is a grave responsibility that has been placed on his shoulders.”

In his closing remarks, Bishop Provost said, “We pray for the success of Pope Leo’s reign. May he promote peace, remaining always faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as the teachings of Sacred Scripture and the Church. May he prove a worthy successor for the See of St. Peter. Viva il Papa! Praised be Jesus Christ.”



**His Holiness, Pope Leo XIV**

## Memorial Mass for Pope Francis reminder of God’s mercy

**By Reverend Andrew DeRouen**  
**Diocese of Lake Charles**

From atop the haphazard stack of sketches on my studio desk, a few of us architecture students – Catholic or otherwise curious – monitored the ongoing papal conclave while completing our projects. We marveled at the fact that from over 5,000 miles away, this emerging technology on YouTube called “livestreaming” could make such a historical event so freely accessible.

It was 2013, and I was a 20-year-old college kid without even a proximate thought of the priesthood on my mind. Little did I know that the appearance of white smoke would so sharply define the imminent era, much less, that by the next time it happened, I would have twice met the very man elected and, after his passing, concelebrated a memorial Mass for him with my brother priests.

While the Church tends to think and move not in days or months but rather in centuries and millennia, I cannot deny that my priesthood began very concretely in the age of Pope Francis.

Certainly, it was the work of the previous popes who guided the Church which I experienced as a child and teenager — the Church which Francis would receive, with all Her perennial challenges in need of relevant solutions. But it was Francis who would draw my attention to the timeless tradition and treasure of the priesthood, which I had clearly taken for granted and to which I was clearly being called.

On Monday, April 28, Bishop Glen John Provost offered *Mass for the Repose of the Soul*

of Pope Francis, together with the priests of the Diocese of Lake Charles, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The Mass marked eight days to the hour of his passing — further reminding us that his death at Easter is a special grace from God pointing to the reality of the Resurrection — the “eighth” and eternal day of the new creation for which we hope. It therefore becomes our duty as Catholics — clergy and lay faithful alike — to pray for Pope Francis what we ourselves long to enjoy in eternity: communion with the Trinity, by means of the Divine Mercy.

In his homily, Bishop Provost recounted Pope Francis’ extraordinary love for the imprisoned — a challenging ministry to which the late Pontiff, even with his other pressing responsibilities, dedicated himself with great compassion, effectively reminding us of the Lord’s offer of redemption to even the most isolated soul.

As a priest, it is humbling to see that in an age increasingly entrenched in secularism, men continue to rise to the occasion in apparent defiance to say — with the surrendering of their lives — that there is more to life than this world. And make no mistake: the more the Church, led by the example of Her priests, clings to this conviction of the Resurrection, the more She will flourish. Why else would we see a dramatic increase in the number of baptisms across the globe this year, if not because the world has finally begun to have enough of the hopelessness offered by Godlessness?

The Holy Spirit remains in control of the Church, orchestrating the movements that



**Priests concelebrated with Bishop Glen John Provost during a Mass for the Repose of the Soul of Pope Francis on Monday, April 28, in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Those concelebrating on the altar included Father Aubrey Guilbeau, Rev. Matthew Panackal, MOC, Father Keith Pellerin, Father Edward Richard MS, Monsignor Daniel A. Torres, VG and the Very Reverend Ruben J. Buller, VG. The Very Reverend Joseph Caraway served as the Master of Ceremonies. Also serving were Deacon Hunter LaRocca, Deacon Anthony Pousson, and Deacon Brian Soileau.**

will lead us into the next era needed for our sanctification.

As we pray for Pope Francis and for the Cardinals entrusted with electing the next

Supreme Pontiff, we give thanks to God for all those He would have succeed St. Peter, because in every age, wherever we find Peter, we find the Lord Himself calling us to something greater.



## Holy Week in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception



On Palm Sunday, Bishop Glen John Provost blessed palms in a ceremony that took place in the Cathedral courtyard before the 9:30 a.m. Mass. The palms were given to those in attendance in remembrance of the welcome the people of Jerusalem gave Jesus, laying the palms before him as he entered the city. Palm Sunday signals the beginning of Holy Week.



After reaching the Oratory, the Bishop kneels and incenses the tabernacle as the faithful venerate the Blessed Sacrament, which remained available for adoration until midnight that evening.



On Good Friday, the only day of the year when Mass is not celebrated, a large wooden cross is processed up the center aisle. It stops three times and is incensed each time and for recited prayers (*Behold the wood of the cross on which hung the salvation of the world and the response Come, let us adore*).



Bishop Provost walks through the Cathedral blessing the people during Easter Vigil in the Holy Night.



At the Chrism Mass, which the Bishop concelebrated with priests from the diocese, the Holy Oils used during the year by the priests in their respective churches, await the blessing of the Oil of the Sick, Bishop Provost's blessing of the Oil of Catechumens and the consecration of the Sacred Chrism. It is with the Sacred Chrism that the newly baptized are anointed and those to be confirmed are signed. It is with the Oil of Catechumens that catechumens are prepared and disposed for Baptism. Finally it is with the Oil of the Sick that those who are ill are comforted in their infirmity. Also during the Mass the priests renew their vows.



Bishop Provost processed with the Blessed Sacrament from the Cathedral to the Oratory of St. Bernadette next door for Adoration.



After Bishop Provost has venerated the cross, he returns to the Cathedra while those in attendance are invited to each do the same in an appropriate manner, before Communion and followed by a quiet departure of all.



The people light their own candles to shed light on the liturgy, ostensibly all coming from the "one light" – the new Paschal Candle.



After he mixed balsam with the olive oil, Bishop Provost breathes into the vessel of Sacred Chrism in a gesture symbolizing both the Holy Spirit coming down to consecrate the oil and the life-giving, sanctifying nature of the sacraments for which it is used.



Deacon Brian Soileau incensed Holy Scripture prior to his proclamation of the Gospel at the Mass of Holy Thursday. It was during this Mass that the washing of the feet of the Apostles by Jesus at the Last Supper was commemorated by the washing of the feet of members of the Cathedral family.



The Easter Vigil must begin after sunset, the start of the new liturgical day, with what previously was called the "Service of Light" but now is known as "The Solemn Beginning of the Vigil or Lucernarium." The solemn liturgy began outside the Cathedral with the blessing of the fire and the preparation of the Paschal Candle (placing five grains of incense into the candle in the form of a cross). Here those who have come to the Easter Vigil exit the Cathedral.



Bishop Provost, lights the Paschal Candle prior to its procession into an otherwise dark Cathedral and its placement next the ambo for the Liturgy of the Word.

## Pope Francis remembered as Pope for the people

By Pamela Seal

Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Deacon Hunter LaRocca still remembers when Pope Francis was elected to the papacy on March 13, 2013.

"I was a junior in high school, and I was getting confirmed that year," he recalled, pointing out that later this year he will be ordained to the priesthood under a new pontiff because of the death of the Holy Father on April 21, 2025.

"In the first instance, I received a new sacrament, and now I will receive another one under a new pope," LaRocca said. "I find this interesting and somewhat providential in that we are always entering into new seasons and phases in the life of the Church, whether it be when some receives a new sacrament for the first time, or the end of a papacy and beginning of a new one."

Deacon LaRocca assisted the Very Rev. Ruben J. Buller, V.G., Pastor of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, at the 12:05 p.m. Mass on the same day that the Supreme Pontiff, 88, died at his residence in the Vatican's Casa Santa Marta.

Pope Francis, the first Jesuit pope, made it clear from the beginning of his papal reign that he was concerned for the well-being of the poor. This was not lost on Deacon LaRocca.

"The thing that inspires me about Pope Francis in regard

to my own journey towards the priesthood is the humility and generosity that he had when it came to his ministry," he remarked. "I think that is the biggest lesson we can take away from him, especially those of us who are in Holy Orders doing the best we can to carry out our ministry in the same way."

In hearing the news about the passing of the Argentina-born pontiff at the start of the Easter Season, Father Buller said it was a "blessed time to die!"

"I was reminded that the original task of the Apostles was to testify to the Resurrection of Christ. That task was given then to Successors of the Apostles, the bishops, and especially to the Bishop of Rome as the Successor of Saint Peter, the Prince of the Apostles," said Father Buller. "I find it a comfort as a Catholic that Pope Francis gave the blessing of Easter known as the Urbi et Orbi (For the City [of Rome] and the World) and then slip into the next life. We are grateful for his service to the Church and see how in his death he testified to the hope of the Resurrection."

Among those attending the Mass was Mable "Doodle" East, a parishioner of St. Margaret of Scotland Catholic Church.

"It was an honor to hear the bells toll when I arrived today. I knew I had to come and pray a rosary for Pope Francis," East said. "Father Buller did a beautiful job in his homily when he said that in Pope Francis' death, he testified to the hope of the

Resurrection on Easter Sunday, and we were able to see him on Sunday for the last time."

Nicholas Poncho, one of 11 seminarians for the Diocese of Lake Charles, said that the death of Pope Francis will forever be etched in his memory.

"I will always remember when Pope Francis died since it happened on my birthday," said Poncho who turned 22 years old on April 21. Now a student at Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, Poncho remarked that he was "quite shocked."

"After I woke up and prayed the Office of Readings and Morning Prayer, ... I saw all the news about the passing of Pope Francis," he said. "It was very somber but very special as well. It is a good time for us to pray for him during this time of Easter."

Poncho said that he has come to learn the importance of praying for the poor through reading many letters written by Pope Francis.

"He had a very closeness of heart for the poor. My pastoral seminary assignment was visiting the homeless and talking to them. While I was doing that, I was thinking about Pope Francis from time to time," he noted. "As I am discerning priesthood, giving my heart to the poor, praying for them, that is something Pope Francis kept reminding us as the Church — to pray for the poor and take care of the most vulnerable."