

ABUSE CASES

Handicap start for Pope Prevost

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Once again the classic saying is confirmed: whoever enters the conclave as the next Pope will leave as a Cardinal. The speed of the election, just four ballots, suggested that the new Pope would be Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the former Secretary of State and the favourite, who was also supported by Cardinal Giovanbattista Re's 'double best wishes' during the *Messa pro Eligendo Pontifice*. Instead, Parolin remains a Cardinal.

The election of Robert Prevost is certainly a surprise, even though his name had been circulating in recent days and as a pope-able contender. It is easy to understand that among those who pushed for his candidacy was the Archbishop of Chicago, Blase Cupich, one of the cardinals appointed by Pope Francis to move the American Church to the 'left'. It is therefore easy to predict that he will follow the line of continuity.

But it will now be up to him to present himself and explain the guidelines of his pontificate, as well as the reasons for choosing the name Leo XIV, which is undoubtedly unexpected and potentially auspicious.

As believers, we cannot but acknowledge the authority of Peter and adopt an attitude of respect and obedience. However, this does not exempt us from expressing strong concerns about the propriety of electing a Pope who, after years in which the Church has been devastated by sex scandals, carries with him serious allegations of covering up abuse. The *Daily Compass* wrote about this three days ago, when we saw that his name was circulating and we were the ones who, last September, published the testimony of three victims who accused the then Bishop of Chiclayo (we are talking about the period 2006-2010) of covering up two Peruvian priests guilty of abuse.

In our previous article, we also revealed the letter sent on 25 March by SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests) to Secretary of State Parolin and to the Cardinals of the dicasteries concerned, Fernandez and Artime, as well as to Sister Simona Brambilla, Prefect of the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life (*here is the full version in English*). The letter contains detailed allegations about the misdeeds of three priests and the responsibility of Prevost both in Chiclayo and in Chicago, when he was Provincial of the Augustinians (Cardinal Cupich is also involved in the latter case).

The case, which came to light in the year 2020, has not yet been clarified, but in recent years everything possible has been done to avoid this clarification, and the documents relating to the case are still with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, waiting for someone to deign to listen to the victims.

Of course it can be said that everyone is innocent until proven guilty, and that is

sacrosanct, but it is also a fact that a characteristic of the past pontificate was to avoid trials of 'friends'.

The fact is that the suspicions surrounding Prevost regarding his mishandling of abuse cases are serious, and this cannot fail to affect his pontificate in some way. Above all, even if he is innocent, he will find himself in a vulnerable position and open to blackmail in the face of a world that gives no concessions to Catholics and to a Church that wants to keep its identity in the world. This is not what the Church needs.

It is easy to imagine that, apart from the abuse victims' associations, no major secular media outlet will pick up the story until the Pope becomes a nuisance. But it will remain a sword of Damocles hanging over his head.

The only way to try to overcome this handicap is to clarify his position and to resolve the sexual abuse scandals left open by his predecessor, especially that of Father Marko Rupnik, in a correct, swift and just manner. May God inspire him.