

HABEMUS PAPAM

Leo XIV introduces himself: the return of evangelisation and verticality

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It is said that the first speech of a Pope, immediately after his appearance on St Peter's balcony, is very revealing of the lines the pontificate will take. If we consider the three previous Popes, we have to conclude that there is some plausibility to this widespread

idea. Those who listened to the words of Leo XIV yesterday can confirm this.

The new Pope gave a speech centred on "the Risen Christ, the Good Shepherd who gave his life for God's flock". He began with the first words of the Risen Christ to the Apostles: "Peace be with you. We live in a time of wars, tragedies and diplomacy, but he did not begin there; he began with Christ and His peace. Human events, especially dramatic ones, cannot be resolved by mankind alone. This verticality of his speech was striking, this turning first to things above.

The reference to Christ continued when he said that we are all "disciples of Christ". Christ goes before us. The world needs His light. Humanity needs Him as a bridge to reach God and His love. Secularisation also affects the Church today. It is a consequence of naturalism, that is, of thinking that the horizontal plane is sufficient in itself, without the vertical plane. Christ precedes and governs human events. This view restores the right relationship between the natural and the supernatural.

The new Pope also invited us to "work as men and women faithful to Jesus Christ, without fear of proclaiming the Gospel, of being missionaries". It has been a long time since we last heard words of evangelisation, or even missionary work understood as proclaiming Christ rather than social promotion. It seemed that the Church had given up on it, considering evangelisation a form of proselytism, a lack of respect for diversity, especially religious diversity, a desire to force the human dimension and committing the Church to acting only as a 'field hospital', where wounds are treated but no therapy is indicated, where questions are heard but no answers are given.

At another point in Pope Leo's speech, the religious dimension of his intervention became clear. This was when he recalled the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii, which coincided with his election, and led the Christian people in the Hail Mary prayer. There was thus a religious, devotional and popular dimension.

These elements, together with the way they were used and the vestments worn, gave the impression of a speech of faith, centred on God, not open to political interpretation, not open to social or ideological interpretation.

The other significant dimension of the speech from the Saint Peter's balcony was the clear proclamation of continuity with Pope Francis. This was evident not so much in the repeated references to peace, which, as we have already seen, is based on Christ as the only true author and foundation of peace and not on a solely or predominantly human peace, but in other details and even in the use of words that recall images often

used by Francis.

Pope Leo said that "God loves us all unconditionally", recalling Francis' idea of a merciful God who neither condemns nor judges. He then warmly invited: "**Help us too**, and then help each other, to **build bridges** through dialogue and encounter, **uniting us all to be one people, always at peace**. Thank you, Pope Francis". The phrase "building bridges, not walls", typical of Pope Francis and even overused, since it's now on everyone's lips, even if inappropriately, returns here almost verbatim, together with the "thank you" to his predecessor on this very point.

The word "dialogue" appears several times in the speech, used in the Bergoglian sense of openness without preconditions, according to the ideas expressed in the encyclical "Fratelli tutti", to which Pope Leo refers in the following words: "Uniting us all to be one people", almost as if dialogue were the profound and decisive reason for unity. Applying these ideas to the Church of Rome, he said that he hoped for "a Church that builds bridges, dialogue, always open to receive, like this square with its arms open", an expression that recalls Pope Bergoglio's "everyone inside", which had caused considerable confusion.

But the point that most marks continuity is the reference to the synodal process: 'We want to be a synodal Church, a Church that goes, a Church that always seeks peace, always seeks charity, always seeks to be close, especially to those who suffer'. This point of the speech is very Bergoglian, even if it is expressed in a softer way. It affirms that synodality is a journey, a process whose goal is a new practice of peace, charity and closeness. Synodality, understood as a process and as a practice, is today the greatest danger for the Church, as we have repeatedly argued, including recently, because it requires its own restructuring, including doctrinal restructuring.

Leo XIV's first speech contained some elements that outline his pontificate. However, one aspect that remains unclear is the choice of name. There will be time to verify its meaning.