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A Latin American sister waits in St. Peter’s Square after white smoke signals the election of a new pope at the Vatican May 8. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

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It's not every day that we receive the news of a new pope — much less when the surprise bears a Latin American connection. Robert Prevost, formerly the archbishop of Chiclayo, Peru, and an Augustinian missionary in that same region, has been elected as the successor to St. Peter.

From the moment the new pope was announced under the name Leo XIV May 8, messages, prayers and words of enthusiasm began pouring in from sisters all over Latin America. As a religious, I joined this wave of gratitude and hope, gathering their voices and feeling part of a conversation that the spirit seems to have reignited with renewed strength.

"Only Jesus could bring together the United States, Europe and Latin America in one single human being," said Sr. Nancy Mancera, a consecrated missionary from the Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity in Colombia.

This — she says — leads her to believe that Leo's message will be one of peace and harmony, just what is needed in these times of war and polarization.

> The spirit continues to blow where she wills. And this time, she has done so through a multicultural pope with a missionary soul and a universal heart.
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From Brazil, Sr. Neusa Santos, a Sister of the Immaculate Conception and communications adviser for the Conference of Religious of Brazil, shared what inspires her about this new beginning: "What gives me hope is his spirit of listening and openness to dialogue."

When thinking of the new pope, one word came to her heart: hope. Santos sees in Leo XIV a pastor who is close to the people, humble and committed to a synodal church — one capable of rekindling the joy of the Gospel and strengthening the bonds among all peoples.

Sr. Dora Tupil, a handmaid of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from Guatemala, said the new pope's election gave her hope and joy. "When I heard his address on peace, I

felt he is someone who truly knows what we need: paz," she said. "And it's not easy to live it."

For Tupil, living peace requires prayer, communion and deep listening. She senses that Leo XIV will continue what Pope Francis began, but with a clear path forward — as long as we know how to build community from the ground up, with everyone included.

Sr. Claudia Verenisse Blanco, of the Servants of God in El Salvador, stands next to Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chávez of San Salvador, El Salvador, reacts as white smoke rises from the Sistine Chapel, signaling the election of a new pope May 8. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

From Cuba, Sr. Daylenis Lara, a Servant of St. Joseph, expressed her hopes for the church.

"With his heart and eyes fixed on Jesus, he will help us be a church that goes forth, barefoot, coherent and committed to the forgotten of the world, to justice and peace," she said. "A synodal church, where everyone has a place at the table and we all have a voice and shared responsibility."

From Uruguay, Sr. Rosa Del Valle, a Sister of the Company of St. Teresa of Jesus, offered a historical and prophetic insight on the chosen name.

"I'm glad about the name he chose. It immediately brought to mind Leo XIII and Rerum Novarum, but also Leo I, who peacefully stood up to Attila and the Huns. And his very first word was: peace."

Sr. Marisol Fernandez, a sister of the Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity in Mexico, also reflected on the pope's name.

"I give thanks to the Holy Spirit for weaving history with the thread of hope, represented in our new pope, Leo XIV," Fernandez said. "His name reminded me of Friar Leo, companion of Francis, whom he called 'Little Lamb of God.' "

The new pope, "with the smell of the sheep," she said, "will lead us along paths that bring about unity and universal peace. The different languages he speaks become tools, bridges that will allow him to cross borders, tear down walls, and generate peace and global communion."

Crowds gather in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican during the newly elected Pope Leo XIV's "Urbi et Orbi" address following his election May 8. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Sr. Clara Malo, of the Society of the Sacred Heart, also from Mexico, summed up her sense of this new papacy as "reconciliation and consensus."

Reading these messages one after another has unleashed a flood of emotions since the moment we heard the words "Habemus Papam." These voice notes and texts are not merely formal reactions to an announcement from the Vatican. They are words straight from the heart, from shared experience, from the living memory of someone who, before becoming pope, walked with the people, listened to their wounds and allowed himself to be touched by their faith.

What moves me, personally, is not only who was elected, but how many sisters feel represented in him. Some knew him personally, others know his journey through

Latin America, and the rest recognize in his life a simpler, more missionary, synodal, deeply human church — the church of Francis, the church of Jesus.

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The name he chose — Leo XIV — didn't fail to surprise. *Leo*, yes, but perhaps not in a show of power, but as a symbol of inner strength with which he can guide us down new paths. His first address, centered on peace, was no coincidence. In the midst of a world in turmoil, his pontificate already has a mission: to reconcile, to heal, to open roads of encounter.

The sisters keep writing. Sometimes it's a short message — a photo of then-Archbishop Prevost standing in a flood in Latin America, an emoji or a prayer. Other times it's longer texts, recalling a gesture, a word, a visit that left a lasting impression. All reflect excitement and hope.

I'm grateful to be part of this network of voices that encourage one another, that pray with the same intention, because beyond our cultural or geographic differences, we are sisters, a community spread across the globe. And in this new chapter of the church, we are living, discerning and celebrating together.

Yes, the spirit continues to blow where she wills. And this time, she has done so through a multicultural pope with a missionary soul and a universal heart.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.