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*Al Priore Generale*

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## LETTER TO THE AUGUSTINIAN FAMILY

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

for three weeks now, we have been experiencing a special time of grace in the Order and throughout the Augustinian Family. The election of our brother, Fr. Robert Francis Prevost, as Supreme Pontiff has been a source of immense joy for all of us, which has been furthered by the numerous expressions of affection and congratulations we have received from all corners of the world. This joy, which springs from the depths of our hearts because of the love we profess for the Church and the personal affection with which we welcome Pope Leo XIV, is not only a sign of recognition for his dedication over so many years as an Augustinian religious, but also an expression of our deep desire to live in communion with our brothers and with him in his ministry as Pastor of the universal Church.

I firmly believe that the Order is called to interpret this event as a great “sign of the times,” as a message from God to us today. In our life of faith, the Lord often speaks to us through signs that we must contemplate with a believing gaze and interpret with the humility that opens our ears to listening and disposes our hearts to love.

After the expectation of the *fumata bianca* (white smoke), the proclamation of the *Habemus Papam*, followed by the name of our brother, stirred within us. And in the midst of that manifestation of the Holy Spirit, active and operative in the Church, the first words of Pope Leo XIV addressed to the faithful and the world resonated with strength and conviction: “Peace be with you!”—the same words with which the Risen Lord greeted his disciples on the first day of Easter. A greeting that becomes a universal call to put an end to conflicts and dispel darkness, opening the way to brotherhood and the light that only the Peace of Christ can offer.

For us Augustinians, Peace in the hearts of each one and in our communities constitutes the first step toward communion. The Augustinian ideal of “*anima una et cor unum in Deum*”<sup>1</sup> now takes on new impetus, encouraged by a shared joy that is not born of human expectations, but of the certainty of the Resurrection. Therefore, I too say to you: “Peace be with you.” This is my greatest wish. As a father longs for the good of his children, so I wish the good of each one of you at this moment, and I invite you all to work to build peace among us, to live in true communion, to journey together in union of souls and hearts.

Last May 13, when the Holy Father came to celebrate the Eucharist with us in the General Curia and once again shared the table with the community, he told us: “*Suddenly, my life has changed completely, and I have had to give up many things, but I will never give up BEING AN AUGUSTINIAN.*” His words moved us and evoked in us the Augustinian profession he had made

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<sup>1</sup> Rule 3

to the world a few days earlier in his first speech from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica: *I am an Augustinian, a son of St. Augustine, who said: "With you I am a Christian, and for you, a Bishop."*<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that this beautiful statement represents a challenge for each of us, who also call ourselves and are *sons and daughters of St. Augustine*.

This "being Augustinian" of the Bishop of Rome is clearly expressed in his papal coat of arms, which includes - along with the lily on a blue background, symbol of the purity of the Virgin Mary - the emblem of our Order: a heart on fire, pierced by the arrow of charity<sup>3</sup> and resting on a book, symbol of sacred science and the Holy Scriptures.

I understand that this time is, without a doubt, a special opportunity to strengthen our union with the Holy Father and to renew our service to the Church. Our Father Augustine presents us with the image of the Church as one body, with Christ as its Head. Each of us is part of that body and, with our particular charism, we are called to collaborate in its building and in the mission of the Church. It is a propitious moment, then, to reflect on our own vocation within the community, in the Order, at the service of the Mystical Body of Christ, which, like our Augustinian communities, is rich in the diversity of its members, who are, however, One in their one Head: *Christ, Shepherd and Guardian of our souls* (cf. 1 Pet 2:25).

Let us work as an Order for a united and missionary Church that seeks peace and justice, composed of men and women without fear, because they have placed their trust in Jesus Christ and desire only to remain faithful to Him. Our Order, with its long missionary history, has proclaimed the Gospel on every continent. Today we wish to continue being the voice and hands of a missionary Church that builds bridges, embraces all those in need of charity, and is a living presence of God's love<sup>4</sup>; a Church that is a community of friends of Jesus, of believers who proclaim the Good News and proclaim the Gospel; a Church that safeguards, deepens, and transmits the faith in unity and communion.

In the words of our brother, Pope Leo XIV, spoken in the Sistine Chapel a few days ago, we want to be a Church *"that is increasingly like a city set on a hill (cf. Rev 21:10), an ark of salvation that navigates the tides of history, a beacon that lights up the nights of the world. And this not so much thanks to the magnificence of its structures and the grandeur of its buildings [...], but rather by the holiness of its members, that 'people chosen to proclaim the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into his marvelous light' (1 Pet 2:9)."*<sup>5</sup> A Church animated and inspired by the principles of the Gospel to which the Holy Father, evoking the Second Vatican Council and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium*, invited us to give our allegiance: *"a return to the primacy of Christ in proclamation (cf. no. 11); the missionary conversion of the entire Christian community (cf. no. 9); growth in collegiality and synodality (cf. no. 33); attention to the sensus fidei (cf. no. 119-120), especially in its most distinctive and inclusive forms, such as popular piety (cf. no. 123); loving care for the weak and discarded (cf. no. 53); courageous and trusting dialogue with the contemporary world in its various components and realities (cf. no. 84, Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1-2)."*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Leo XIV, First Greeting, 8 May 2025

<sup>3</sup> Conf. IX, 2, 3

<sup>4</sup> Leo XIV, First Greeting, 8 May 2025

<sup>5</sup> Homily of the Holy Father, Leo XIV in the Holy Mass pro ecclesia, 9 May 2025

<sup>6</sup> Discourse of the Holy Father Leo XIV to the College of Cardinals, 10 May 2025



The Latin motto *In illo uno unum* (“In the One – Christ - we are one”) profoundly expresses this ideal. The Church, as the Body of Christ, can only live through Him, with Him, and in Him, and likewise, in our communities, we can only live united by Charity. Without Charity, our communities would fail and lose their reason for being. It is love that leads us to enter into the innermost depths of our being to discover there the Lover and the Beloved - *interior intimo meo*, as our Father<sup>7</sup> said - the true author of communion.

Since the election of our Brother Robert F. Prevost as Pope, we have received countless calls from young people eager to know our charism. Although a vocation is always the work of the Lord, the current circumstances, which have led to a large number of people hearing about our Order through the media, can be a favorable opportunity to awaken in many a concern or desire to live our way of life. This vocational challenge reminds us that young people need welcoming communities that listen to them and accompany them in their discernment. Let us call young people not to be afraid and to accept the Lord’s call!

I thank all those who have collaborated in addressing the media that have approached us. Many professionals have expressed their gratitude “for the open, helpful, and humble welcome they have received.” Some of the questions most frequently posed to us by the media have been: “What is the essence of Augustinian life?” “What does your charism consist of?” “What does it mean for the Holy Father to be an Augustinian?” Undoubtedly, the Pope’s frequent citations of the writings of Saint Augustine will foster knowledge of his doctrine, a task to which we too are called. Therefore, echoing Pope Benedict XVI’s exhortation to the Augustinians, which Pope Leo also reminded us of during his visit to the Curia, I invite you: let us read more of Our Father’s works, let us draw closer to him in our minds and affections, let us meditate on his life, let us invoke his intercession, let us immerse ourselves in his teachings, because this will help us live with greater love our consecration to God, to whom we too can turn with the words of Augustine: “*Beauty ever ancient and ever new, help me to live ever anew that Love which I once tasted and breathed, and for which I yearn, and for which I hunger and thirst.*”<sup>8</sup>

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us on this journey we wish to walk alongside our beloved Pope Leo XIV. Let us ask him to grant us a time of renewal for our communities, in which the fire of his love helps us recognize our brothers as brothers. Let us also ask him, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, and of our Father Saint Augustine, to grant us the gift of *making ourselves small so that Christ may be known and glorified* (cf. *Jn 3:30*), *spending ourselves to the end so that no one may lack the opportunity to know and love him.*<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>7</sup> Conf. III, 6, 11

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Conf. X, 27, 28

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Homily of the Holy Father Leo XIV in the Holy Mass pro ecclesia, 9 May 2025