

Daily Meditation 5-12-25

Letter of Humanity to Welcome Brother Leo

Good morning.

I'm recording this on Saturday, and you'll be receiving it on Monday. So in between, there is the big day of Mother's Day. So I wish you all a Happy Mothers' Day, a day late.

And it's such an important feast, especially at this time in history, when Mother Earth is being so despoiled, and where children are being so often abused by politicians and others, so much going on in our country that is abusive to children. The richest man in the world is killing children in Africa, having pulled the plug out from under USAID and so forth, which includes vaccines for AIDS, and for so many other diseases, to say nothing of food and the rest. And the attacks on Medicaid, on SNAP, on children's education. So many other things are an assault on children and therefore on mothers, the country over.

So I'd like to speak this morning to the topic that's been in the news all week, that of a new pope. It's interesting that the first email I got was from a Buddhist, asking me whether I can trust this pope and what I thought of him, and so forth. And then a second letter I received, there was a public letter, not just a letter to me personally, from the desk of Rabbi Arthur Waskow, and he wrote this. It was entitled "Prayers for the Pope."

Dear companions, our prayer for this weekend: Breath of Life, we thank you for your presence in us and among us, and in choosing a new pope who is ready to move forward in the agenda of Pope Francis. We thank all the members of the Shalom Center on Substack for joining in the prayer, just before the Conclave and the Cardinals met. The prayers of thousands of members of the Shalom Center and many others, have brought the Spirit swooping in, to bring forward Pope Leo XIV, who has both feet in the Americas, the America of Chicago, Illinois and the America of Peru. May Pope Leo the 14th live and love with continued cooperation toward the global south, and toward the people of the US, living under a president who is anti-immigrant, anti-woman, anti-European, anti-LGBTQ, anti-Palestinian, anti-labor, anti-Muslim. Shalom, Arthur.

So I really think it's a sign of our times, and a strong sign of our times, that the papacy, due to television, the media and all the rest, and also, I think, to the desperation in our souls today, that the papacy is something far beyond Catholics. That all humans of goodwill want spokespeople for ethics, for morality, for justice, for spirituality. And of course, we all hope that this particular pope, who is young, could easily be in office for 20 years, that this pope is of that ilk. And clearly he is a close friend to Pope Francis, and shares many of his perspectives, including the fact that he lived in South America for almost 20 years. So it brings together the amalgam of the America of the North and the America of the South, and that's a very important dynamic all over the world today, of course. And he is about *Laudato Si*, the Pope's encyclical about preserving the planet.

Now, there was also a headline and a long article in Rolling Stone of all places, about the pope. I'll just share with you the headline: "MAGA Melts Down over New Pope's Anti-Trump, Pro-Immigrant Social

Media." Pope Leo XIV, before he was pope, had his own social media, and he criticized the vice president JD Vance, for trying to restrict love to one's family, and one's own country, and he also criticized these issues of immigration and so forth. So that's one more evidence that the papacy is beyond just the Roman Catholic Church, when Rolling Stone runs a long article on it with the headlines about MAGA melting down. A sign of the times we live in.

I asked myself if I should write the Pope a letter, like I wrote Pope Francis when he was elected, a series of letters, *Letters to Pope Francis*. And what I would say in a letter to Pope Leo XIV, who was elected, I think in spite of being an American. We've heard for years that there wouldn't be an American Pope, and that's understandable, given America's prominence around the world. You think the Pope would come from another class, if you will. But I think it's very interesting that we have this pope who is half North American, if you will, with one foot in North America and one foot in South America. Very significant.

Now, one thing I find interesting and important is the name that he chose. Pope Leo XIII, the previous Pope Leo, late 19th century, early 20th century, was a champion of social justice. He is always referred to as the pope who launched the social justice perspective in an explicit way, by his encyclicals, into the Catholic Church. And it was a time, of course, of the beginning of the unions. On the one hand, it was a time of Marxism going on in Europe; and in America, it was time of great immigration, many of the immigrants coming from Catholic countries, Italy, Ireland, Poland and so forth. A lot of upheaval because of the Industrial Revolution. And of course, pre-labor unions, you had six-day weeks, 10-hour work days, children working, and a lot of dangerous work going on in mines and factories and so forth.

So Pope Leo was famous for his outspoken stance on social justice. And I think that just as Pope Francis, in choosing the name Francis, really stepped out and made a point by choosing Francis, no other Pope had ever used that name, chosen that name. So I think that this choice is very deliberate on the part of this present pope, and that it's a very good sign, because of what his predecessor Pope Leo, stood for.

And the word "love" can be thrown around cheaply and by anybody, on soap operas and all the rest. But love of justice is the real dimension where structures get criticized. And that's where Pope Francis, of course, made many enemies, and as he said, most of them are in America, because the far-right wing Catholic tradition in America is very loud and very rich, which allows its voice to be heard far beyond its numbers, because it owns so much media. And they immediately jumped on this new pope, calling him a Marxist and all the rest, names that they had previously applied to Francis, because Francis dared to criticize the system that is destructive.

One of the words, the phrases that Pope Leo XIV used in his first homily, was The Dark Night. That really struck me, because I'm currently writing a book about that, and other dimensions to the work of St. John of the Cross. So I was struck by that, because I've been saying for years that we're living in a dark night of society, in a dark night of our species, as we face extinction, and as we face the wars, and the undoing of democracy that is definitely on the agenda in this country and many others. So I certainly want to address them there, and the ecumenism that Pope Francis stood for, is certainly going to be, I think, evident and public in this new pope as well.

Now his record on homosexuality is not particularly positive. But it was way back in 2012 that he wrote a very familiar statement on the negativity of homosexuality. But I would certainly address him, were I

to write him a letter, hoping he would read it, that it's a scientific question. It's not a biblical question, and science has spoken. Back in the 1970s it spoke. It has been over 50 years. And so many religious people or leaders have apparently not studied science. But we were promised, when Pope Paul II finally removed the condemnation of Galileo after 500 years, that religion would listen to science. Well, it's not listening to science about homosexuality. Now, if there are 8.2 billion human beings in the world, which there are at this time, that means there are around 800 million homosexuals: 800 million people who are homosexual. And many of them receive very bad messages from religion, and therefore a very high percentage go into suicide, or self-destruction in many ways. So it's not a small thing we're talking about. 800 million people is a lot of human beings. They are gay, and it's a scientific thing. That is to say, science has established that 8-10% of any given human population anywhere in the world is going to be gay or lesbian.

So I hope that the Pope recognizes what I've been saying for years, that this is the Galileo question of the 21st century. So that is an area where I hope he can learn. And meanwhile, I think it's wonderful that the prayers of the Jewish people and the Buddhist people, and humanists and atheists and Protestants and others, who are trying to support this person who in his particular very public role, has significant amount of power to speak truth to power, and that the truth he speaks would be the truth of justice and peace and compassion.

Thank you. See you next week.