

A bridge builder and tennis player



DEIRDRE
PIKE
OPINION

The most powerful American in the world right now is not the president but the pope. The Donald has been trumped by The Leo.

Known for most of his life as either Rob, Bob or Padre Prevost, His Holiness Leo XIV is perfectly poised to be the first true "Pope of The Americas," not the "American Pope" as most of the U.S. media incessantly repeats.

Argentinian by birth, Pope Francis (RIP) was the first to wear the moniker representing the Americas, but Robert Francis Prevost's deep roots in his birthplace of Chicago, as well as citizenship in his adopted country of Peru, gives the 267th pope of the Roman Catholic Church a firmer footing in both Americas, north and south.

As I chatted in line at a local coffee shop this week, a Peruvian server cheered when she overheard me discussing Leo as the former Bishop of the Diocese of Chiclayo, and his direct reference to the Chiclayanos in Peru during his first pontifical address.

Like many people I've heard from this week, she was worried for the church when she heard the words "pope" and "America" in the same sentence.

Now the worry has been replaced with curiosity and cautious optimism. Many signs point to a good and faithful leader emerging as the Fisherman's Successor.

While I may have felt disappointment when I heard he had not chosen the name Francis II, all that was lifted when I heard a great piece of news from Greg Tedesco at Rosedale Tennis Club.

Though he had a hard time watching "Conclave," when he realized Cardinal Tedesco was a staunch traditionalist who would never make pope in the movie, Tedesco had discovered the Holy Father has a holy love for tennis. A longtime fan and player, he had been asked by a reporter this week about the possibility of hosting a charity tennis tournament. Leo quipped, "Yes, but we can't invite Sinner," joking about the wayward surname of the Italian who is the highest ranked player in the world.

Jannik Sinner, the top seed at the Italian Open, had an audience with the Top Seed at the Holy See, where he gifted the Divine Server with two new rackets and an offer to play the Papal Ace.

Leo returned the favour with another joke about his white robes meeting the clothing requirements at Wimbledon.

He also not only left journalists laughing this week, he also stood ardently on their side, calling for the release of journalists imprisoned for their work, and underscoring freedom of the press as essential for a free and democratic society.

"I repeat to you today the invitation made by Pope Francis — We do not need loud, forceful communication, but rather communication that is capable of listening and of gathering the voices of the weak who have no voice."

Pope Leo XIV has made it clear he will use his voice to ensure correct messages are being communicated.

One of his last posts on X as Cardinal Bob shows he does not suffer fools gladly, announcing, "JD Vance is wrong. Jesus doesn't ask us to rank our love for others."

As for 2SLGBTQI+ people in the church, the youth of Leo's 69 years are important. With the potential of a solid decade at the helm, there is time for him to learn.

So far, his statements in this area have been few and far between, with the last in 2012. They sound stiff and stunted, with exclusionary words about lifestyle and choices, as if he hasn't had the luxury of being in community with queer and trans people.

I think his education has begun. Fr. James Martin, a Jesuit who is well known as the previous Pope's informal but regular advisor on LGBTQ issues, wrote a book called "Building a Bridge" on dialogue between the Catholic Church and LGBTQ community.

While the new pontiff was adjusting his view from the balcony on his first day to the sea of Catholics below him, and in return the world was squinting to glimpse the new occupant in the See of Peter, three times he referred to the importance of building bridges through dialogue.

May he be a master builder.

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Italy's Jannik Sinner, left, shares a light moment with Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican on Wednesday.



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

Writing about art and mystery, Thomas Froese mentions two similar lion paintings now in his family. In front is the painting from Montreal, now gifted to the writer's son, Jonathan.

You never know what life might be trying to tell you



THOMAS
FROESE
OPINION

It's easy to get so distracted and even discouraged in life that we miss the point of it all, so busy or otherwise preoccupied with the clattering noise that we miss how ordinary events — a casual walk or a train ride home — can show the world's beauty and order.

Mathematics has order. In middle school, I'd walk with Glen Greschuk to a high school for advanced math because we were decent enough at it. Now I have my son Jonathan. Before today's math, though, here's something.

Just before Easter, Jonathan and I had visited Montreal, including Notre Dame, the historic church visited by millions every year. We later sat in the public square outside, where a busker's song reminded Jonathan of our family's early-morning school runs in Uganda.

Those long bumpy drives, for years, were bearable for the kids only with music and audio stories. One was "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," the well-known Narnia story by C.S. Lewis, translated into dozens of languages. The Shaw Festival now has one adaptation. Sitting in that square, we recalled this also, the original storybook being good for any age.

Jonathan and I then wandered somewhat aimlessly through historic Old Montreal. That's when we

spotted, funnily enough, in a gallery window, a striking lion painting that's similar to a lion painting in our home that came from Uganda.

"That's really something," I said. "And we were just talking about Narnia."

We were so struck by that Montreal painting — it's by Montreal native Josée Forest — that it's now Jonathan's gift: a reminder of this father-son trip, and his boyhood in Africa, and that Narnia lion who teaches the children about friendship and love and courage and adventure.

We left Montreal in wonder of the lion coincidence, my boy on a train back to Ottawa and aerospace engineering studies (why I rely on him for math), myself Toronto-bound. Once aboard his train, Jonathan teased. "I've made it safely in Seat 2D."

I looked at my assigned seat, 12D. Really? Different trains and identical seat numbers? What are the odds? A car has 64 seats.

Laughing about it, later we discovered on two trains of five cars, we both had Car 4. Come on. And those odds?

Jonathan explains the answer involves the probability of two independent events intersecting. The chance of two travellers on two, five-car trains "randomly" assigned the same seat and car number, like we were, is one in 320. But the chance of two travellers assigned the same "specific, non-random" seat and car number is one in 102,400.

Likewise, the chance of Pope

Francis' death recently intersecting with Easter weekend (a "specific, non-random" four-day weekend) is tiny. But life is not an equation to be solved as much as it's an experience to be had and enjoyed, like a story or song. So the odds of that Montreal lion appearing? Who knows?

And what, if anything, is the message when we have these strange, personally tailored experiences, these unexplainable wonders? Maybe it's something like, "You've appeared right on time. You're in the right place. You're not forgotten." Or, in this case, "Jonathan, you're on the right track. Literally. Be encouraged."

This week, we hung that Montreal painting in Jonathan's space. How cool to be reminded of the wind and how it blows where it will.

By the way, the Greek word for God's workmanship, how your life (or mine or Jonathan's or the neighbours') is like a work of art, is "poema." It's where we get the word "poem." No wonder our teachers, the good ones anyway, always said (repeatedly to some of us) "Pay attention!"

So keep your eyes and ears open. Remember, that lion in Narnia — "He's not a tame lion, you know" — can appear when the children least expect it. Take time, then. Listen carefully. You never know what your life might be trying to tell you. Even in this wobbly old world, light and mystery are on the move.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. HE'S AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

Is this Ford's idea of protecting Ontario?

TIM GRAY

Premier Doug Ford sailed to his recent election victory speaking loudly from behind a podium decked out with a "Protect Ontario" sign.

He ran for a third term laser-focused on promising to save us all from U.S. President Donald Trump.

So why now does it seem that protecting us from the U.S. involves slashing environmental laws and giving special powers to his friends? Take the newly introduced Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act (Bill 5). From the title, it sounds like the bill is focused on boosting Ontario's economy by creating new jobs, finding new markets and generally taking on the U.S. tariffs and threat to Canada's sovereignty.

But move past the title and you'll see a different reality.

The bill would in fact give the premier and his cabinet the power to hand-pick individuals or companies who would then be allowed to bypass any or all of Ontario's provincial and municipal laws. Anyone who makes a successful pitch could be exempt from all labour, occupational health and safety, pollution,

planning and public safety laws for whatever project or development they desire.

There are no criteria in the bill for who gets these special powers, on what basis they would be designated or even their geographic scope.

Bill 5 also proposes to exempt the Eagle's Nest Mine in northern Ontario and a proposed landfill near Dresden, Ont., from Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act.

The mine, which is located near the Ring of Fire, is not expected to meet federal review criteria, meaning that without a provincial assessment it would be allowed to proceed without any social or economic review.

The Ford government initially designated the proposed landfill for an environmental assessment in response to strong opposition from the local community, and in the midst of a provincial byelection.

During that byelection, all major candidates came out in opposition of the proposed landfill, including the successful Conservative candidate Steve Pinsonneault. Following Pinsonneault's re-election this year, the Ford government seems to have changed its mind — Bill 5 would now remove the environ-

mental assessment requirement from the landfill and allow it to proceed without review.

These anti-democratic attacks are accompanied by the bill's proposed repeal of the province's Endangered Species Act. If passed, developers would have no legal requirement to protect plants and animals on the brink of extinction. Even the role of determining which species are endangered or threatened would fall to a government minister, not scientists as is currently the case.

Rather than saving us from Trump, these seizures of power by the premier actually mirror the U.S. administration's play to slash environmental protections and centralize power in the hands of big-tech billionaires and industry insiders.

Just weeks after his re-election, Ford now seems to share Trump's view that any law that protects water, air, wildlife, cultural values or public safety should be swept away to cater to the interests of his favoured friends. History has shown us that such an approach will be costly for us all, including for business.

This is not the path that Ontarians were promised by the premier, and we need to remind government MPPs across the province that we expect better. As we know from watching the growing disaster south of the border, the future of our country depends on it.

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