

## There are moments when a single sentence makes the air stand still.

Easter Saturday, at the Prayer Vigil for Peace in St Peter's Basilica, it was even an entire paragraph of Pope Leo XIV's address. With a clarity rarely witnessed from this otherwise measured pontiff, he called out to the powerful of this world:

*"Stop! It is time for peace! Sit at the table of dialogue and mediation, not at the table where rearmament is planned and deadly actions are decided!"*

Comment by Thomas Philipp Reiter, also to listen in German on [radio horeb](#).



Pope Leo XIV in the Vatican Audience Hall Pope Paul VI (Photo: Thomas Philipp Reiter)

This was no diplomatic appeal. This was, rather, a prophetic address. Pope Leo spoke of *"that delusion of omnipotence that surrounds us and is becoming increasingly unpredictable and aggressive"*. He observed that *"even the holy Name of God, the God of life, is being dragged into discourses of death."* And he offered a diagnosis that is hard to ignore: human beings turn *"themselves and their own power into a mute, blind and deaf idol,"* to which every value is being sacrificed — an idol, according to the Pope, *"demanding that the whole world bend its knee."*

Anyone who speaks in such terms knows he will provoke opposition. And opposition came promptly — from the Holy Father's own country, the United States. President Donald Trump, politically responsible for the war against Iran and whose escalating threats the Pope had previously called *"truly unacceptable,"* branded Leo XIV on his platform Truth Social as *"weak"* and *"terrible on foreign policy."* He followed up by sharing an AI-generated image depicting himself in a Jesus-like pose and demanded that the Pope *"get his act together"* and stop being *"a politician."* Trump has since deleted the image, but the damage remains — and it runs deep. Even Catholics who until now had stayed loyal to Trump are turning away in irritation. That Vice President J.D. Vance — himself a convert to Catholicism — subsequently admonished the Pope to exercise caution in his theological statements only made matters worse.

It is striking to observe who spoke up next. Not only the U.S. bishops and, by now, the German Bishops' Conference have clearly positioned themselves behind the Pope — even though he himself

called for restraint on the matter. But of all people, Giorgia Meloni — Italy's Prime Minister, who together with recently voted-out Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán had been considered Trump's closest European ally — called the U.S. President's words to the Holy Father *"unacceptable."* She added that it was "right and normal" for the Pope to call for peace and to condemn every form of war. That it is Meloni, of all people, framing this as a rebuke directed at Washington is a political thunderclap. And it shows: the Pope may be insulted by some as "weak" — but he is evidently strong enough to stir the conscience even where political alliances had seemed firmly sealed.

The Vatican curial official Antonio Spadaro put it this way on the platform X: Trump's attack was an "admission of powerlessness." Anyone attempting to delegitimize the voice of the Pope implicitly acknowledges its weight. "If Leo were irrelevant, he would not be worth a single word."

One could be tempted to dismiss the whole affair as yet another episode in the long chain of Trumpian outbursts. But it is not that simple. For what is being negotiated here is, at its core, *genuinely* a theological question: May the Church remain silent when peoples are being bombed? May the Pope remain silent when threats of nuclear weapons are being normalized? Leo XIV has given a clear answer to this question. He told journalists on the flight to his Apostolic Journey to Algeria that he had the "moral duty to speak out against war." And he added a sentence that gave particular pause: "I have no fear."

### ***"I have no fear."***

"I have no fear." This is the language of the Gospel. This is the language of those who, when in doubt, obey God rather than men. Pope Leo paraphrased precisely this sentence in his Vigil address when he said that the Church *"instills obedience to God rather than any human authority, especially when the inherent dignity of other human beings is threatened by continuous violations of international law."*



*Hermitage of Brother Klaus in Flüeli-Ranft, Switzerland (Photo: Thomas Philipp Reiter)*

When it comes to peace, it is worth turning to the historical figure of Saint Nicholas of Flüe, the Swiss apostle of peace — Brother Klaus from the Ranft in the canton of Obwalden. A man of the 15th century, a family father, a hermit, a mystic — and the saviour of the Swiss Confederation from civil war. In 1481, at the Diet of Stans, the young Confederation stood on the brink of breaking apart. At

the last minute, a messenger brought Brother Klaus's counsel into the heated assembly. The content of that counsel remains disputed to this day — but the outcome is known: the Diet came to an agreement. War was averted. A praying, poor man from a hermitage had achieved more than all political emissaries combined.

### ***What would Nicholas of Flüe do?***

What would Brother Klaus advise today? He would, in all likelihood, say exactly what Pope Leo said on Saturday — only perhaps in even simpler words. He would recall his famous saying: “Peace is always in God, for God is peace.” He would call out to us: Do not make the fence too wide! Frugality, moderation, prayer — these are not flights from the world, but the only viable foundation for a world without war. Brother Klaus knew: those who have no peace within cannot create peace without. Those who are at war with themselves, with their ego, with their appetites, will carry that war outward — into their family, their community, their politics, the world.

This is precisely what Pope Leo means when he speaks of the “idolatry of self.” And this is precisely what Brother Klaus lived and prayed against his entire life.



**For those who would like to learn more about this extraordinary Swiss saint, a dedicated podcast exists: in “*Bruder Klaus — Der Podcast*,” we explore the life, the prayer and the message of the apostle of peace and Swiss patron saint — available wherever podcasts are found. Not nostalgically, but with the question of what this man has to say to us today.**

Pope Leo put it succinctly on Saturday: “Everyone has a place in the mosaic of peace!” Brother Klaus had found his place — in prayer, in solitude, and then, at the decisive moment, in a single piece of wise counsel. And the Holy Father has now invited all of us to find our own particular place of peace. May *he* be heard.

**More on Brother Nicholas of Flüe (in German / French / Italian): <https://bruderklaus.com/>**