

JANUARY 20, 2026 FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

On Thursday, May 8th, 2025, when Cardinal Robert Prevost appeared as the newly elected Pope of the Catholic Church, many experts and ordinary people alike were completely surprised and asked, "Robert who?" They were surprised because his name was not terribly familiar, because his name was not prominent in the list of names published by the self-appointed experts, because the conventional wisdom was that there would not be an American Pope at this time, and there were many other cardinals who were considered to be the frontrunners because they were more known, because they were more active in the Vatican's diplomatic circles and so on.

A similar thing happened when Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected and took the name of Pope Francis, because his name was not found anywhere in the list put out by the self-appointed experts.

Sisters and brothers, I'm sure we have all heard the phrase, "God's ways are mysterious," and that remains true and has remained true throughout history, sometimes shattering human expectations and predictions.

In today's first reading we have a familiar scene of the Prophet Samuel anointing David to be the future king of the Israelites, and we have here, in the first reading, the familiar words of the Lord to Samuel: "For the Lord does not see as the mortals see. They look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." And this verse is very instructive to us in terms of comparing the divine perspective and human perspective. What we may see as the obvious human choice is not always God's choice.

God is reminding Samuel, and, of course, us here, that appearances can be deceiving and rarely tell the full story, and God is pushing Samuel to

look past the physical attributes and to examine the character of the person. We know the story of David. What set David apart was not his perfection. It was his sincere desire to honour God, his repentance when he sinned, and his deep trust in the Lord all through his life.

As God did with Samuel in today's first reading, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus is pushing the Pharisees to look beyond human-made laws and rules, and to see human value and human need.

Sisters and brothers, our culture today puts so much emphasis on image, on one's appearance. We have heard the term "body shaming" in our time more than probably ever before, which puts emphasis on one's appearance and, a lot of the time, puts pressure on people as to how they should look.

Today's Gospel and today's first reading is a good reminder, and through these readings, God is pushing us, as He did with Samuel, and today Jesus is pushing us, as He did with the Pharisees, to look beyond the obvious, to look beyond what is visible to our naked eyes, and to see the indwelling of God in each and every person whom we encounter on our journey through life.

Now, I know, I know it is not always easy for us, and it is easier said than done. We all have moments, including myself, when we tend to judge, moments when we make assumptions about others. This doesn't mean we simply put our hands up and say, "I'm a failure, I can't seem to overcome it." Rather, let us keep trying. Let us keep asking for God's help, asking God to slowly mould us into His liking, into His image, because, as we read in the scriptures, nothing is impossible with God's help.

Amen.

