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Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatica

Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican as he leads, for the first time, the midday recitation of the "Regina Coeli" prayer May 11, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Rome — May 11, 2025
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"Never again war!" Pope Leo XIV said from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in his first Sunday address on May 11 before a packed crowd in the square and streets of Vatican City.

Leo's appeal for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine and a ceasefire in Gaza included the phrase pontiffs have uttered since Pope Paul VI, who led the church from 1963 to 1978.

"In today's dramatic scenario of a third world war being fought piecemeal, as Pope Francis has repeatedly stated, I too turn to the world's leaders, repeating the ever-timely appeal: never again war," he said.

The noontime "*Regina Caeli*" (Latin for "Queen of Heaven") address, the prayer dedicated to the Virgin Mary, lasted just over 10 minutes and was the first of his four-day-old papacy. Leo delivered it from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, where he first appeared on May 8 after his election as the first pope from the United States.

As the pontiff sang the Marian "*Regina Caeli,*" tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square joined him.

> 'Be not afraid! Welcome the call of the church and of Christ the Lord.'
> —Pope Leo
>
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Among the faithful was Chicagoan Angelica Roberts, 64, her eyes welling with tears. "It felt like he was speaking directly to each of us, bridging divides and reminding us of our shared humanity," Roberts said. "His words about peace and unity resonated

deeply, especially when he mentioned the third world war we're in."

In his address, Leo pleaded for humanitarian aid to be allowed into the Gaza Strip and for the release of Israeli hostages. The new pope also praised the recent ceasefire reached by India and Pakistan following military action last week.

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Leo XIV began his comments discussing the Catholic Church's World Day of Prayer for Vocations, which is being celebrated today.

"It is important that young men and women on their vocational journey find acceptance, listening and encouragement in their communities, and that they can look up to credible models of generous dedication to God and to their brothers and sisters," he said.

"Let us take up the invitation that Pope Francis left us in his Message for today: the invitation to welcome and accompany young people," he said.

Then, speaking off the cuff, Leo spoke to young people in Italian, saying, "Be not afraid! Welcome the call of the church and of Christ the Lord."

The moment was reminiscent of Pope John Paul II's 1978 installation Mass as the new pope when he uttered the same words.



An estimated 100,000 people were at St. Peter's Square for Pope Leo XIV's "Regina Caeli" blessing May 11, four days after he was elected to lead the Catholic Church. People waved flags from their native countries and sang the "Regina Caeli" prayer with Leo. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Italian authorities estimate that more than 100,000 people were at the new pontiff's blessing today — many waving flags from their homelands.

A group of Peruvians on the plaza waved a flag that said "Chiclayo presente," or "Chiclayo is here," referring to the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, where Leo served as priest and bishop. They shouted "el papa es chiclayano, el papa es peruano," or "the pope is from Chiclayo, the pope is Peruvian."



A group of Peruvians at St. Peter's Square waved a flag that said "Chiclayo presente," or "Chiclayo is here," referring to the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, where Pope Leo XIV served as priest and bishop, on May 11. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Leo is a point of pride for Peru, said Victoria Cazaña, a pilgrim in St. Peter’s Square. Leo has never forgotten Peruvians and acknowledges how his years there shaped him. He is considered a brother to many Peruvians, Cazaña said.

"I had a lot of emotions, happiness, joy, pride," Cazaña said. "He knows values that are important and that have been lost."

Cazaña said she was overjoyed when Leo walked to the balcony with the Gospel on his lips when he extended a greeting of peace.

Pope Leo XIV has kept a full schedule since his election on May 8.

On May 9, he celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving in the Sistine Chapel with the College of Cardinals.

Leo met with the cardinals on Saturday, May 10, and vowed to continue the reforms of Francis and then paid a surprise visit to Our Lady of Good Counsel in Genazzano, outside Rome. The shrine has been run by the Augustinian Order, of which he is a member, since 1200.

On the way back to Rome, Leo XVI visited the tomb of Francis at Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore, where he prayed and left a white rose.



An Italian youth group joined an estimated 100,000 people in St. Peter's Square for Pope Leo XIV's "Regina Caeli" blessing May 11. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)

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Before his "*Regina Caeli*" address, the pope celebrated Mass in the Vatican grottoes at an altar near the tomb of Peter, the first pope.

Leo delivered his morning Mass homily in English, before offering some reflections in Italian.

Cardinals should live as examples that attract people to religious life, the pope said: "Living the joy of the Gospel, not discouraging others, but rather looking for ways to encourage young people to hear the voice of the Lord and to follow it and to serve in the church."

Many Americans were in the crowd at St. Peter's Square. One banner held aloft said "TEXAS." James Vazquez, 28, of Los Angeles, said the pontiff's call for peace in conflict zones struck a powerful chord. "Being here to witness this firsthand is something I'll carry with me forever," he said.

María Luisa Montalvo, a Peruvian living in Italy, carrying a flag from her native country, said Peru seems to have touched the pope's heart because he mentioned it when he first addressed the crowd. "We want to be with him and support him," Montalvo said. "From the point of view of people of faith."

Even Romans seemed impressed.

Sr. Valentina Dogliazzi, an 82-year-old nun living in Rome, described the moment as transformative. "This moment feels like a new chapter for the church, one filled with promise and grace. I'm happy Pope Leo gave us this gift,"

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This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.