Vatican
Vatican News



The fisherman's ring — the pope's signet — is seen on the right hand of Pope Benedict XVI as he celebrates Mass in Havana, Cuba, March 28, 2012. When a pope dies or resigns the ring is destroyed in a special ceremony, usually carried out in private. (CNS/Catholic Press Photo/Alessia Giuliani)



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On Sunday morning, May 18, a Mass for the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV will take place in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. Although the Mass is no longer described as an "enthronement," it is full of rich symbolism.

More than 200 political leaders from around the globe are expected to attend the Mass, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Britain's Prince Edward, the royals of Spain, U.S. Vice President JD Vance, Argentine President Javier Milei, Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Here are key symbols and steps of the Mass, based on the Vatican's official liturgical book (published in Italian), the "Order of Rites for the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome."



A gold metallic embroidered stole of Pope John XXIII and the papal tiara of Pope Paul VI are displayed at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington on Oct. 30, 2009. (CNS/Bob Roller)

Symbols of the pontificate: papal tiara, pallium and fisherman's ring

Formerly, the enthronement ceremony included crowning the pope with the papal tiara or "triregnum," a golden crown composed of three overlapping crowns, a symbol of spiritual, temporal and supreme power. The last pontiff to wear it was Pope Paul VI in 1963, after which he decided he would give up its use, though he left it to his successors to reintroduce it.

The papal tiara is a symbol of the threefold power (spiritual, temporal and supreme):

- The papal tiara is made of gold, decorated with sacred images and precious stones;
- Shortly after his election, Pope Paul VI (Giovanni Battista Montini) decided not to wear it anymore, as times had changed;
- Paul VI had his own tiara sold and donated the proceeds to international missions;
- Today, Paul VI's tiara is kept at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.;
- Although he did not ban its use for his successors, no pope has worn it since.

The pallium is a strip of white wool with five red embroidered crosses, a symbol of pastoral mission and communion with the universal church:

- The pallium is woven by the Benedictine nuns of Santa Cecilia in Urbe in Trastevere, Rome;
- It is made from the wool of two lambs from Trappist monks, who bless the lambs on Jan. 21, the feast of St. Agnes;
- The pallium is fastened with three pins resembling the nails of the cross, and is worn on the shoulders.



The pallium is fitted on Pope Francis during his inaugural Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 19, 2013. With his fisherman's ring and the pallium, the main symbols of the Petrine office, the pontiff chose styles in continuity with two of his predecessors. (CNS/Reuters/Stefano Rellandini)

The fisherman's ring, delivered by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, represents the link with St. Peter and the pope's apostolic mission:

- The ring is made of pure gold, engraved with St. Peter's boat surrounded by the new pope's name;
- The ring is about 4.3 inches wide;
- Formerly used as a seal for papal documents, the ring is now a symbol that is broken, destroyed or canceled upon the pontiff's death.

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Key moments

The Mass of the beginning of the pontificate will be conducted according to the "Order of Rites for the Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome," introduced in 2005 and updated in 2013. The main moments are:

1. **The greeting:** The concelebrating cardinals in white liturgical robes greet the Altar of the Confession in St. Peter's Basilica.
2. **The altar:** The pope goes up to the altar, kisses it, incenses it and a deacon takes the Book of the Gospels.
3. **St. Peter's tomb:** The pontiff descends to St. Peter's tomb inside the basilica for a moment of prayer and incensing.
4. **The reliquary:** The pallium and the fisherman's ring are taken from the reliquary by the cardinal protodeacon.
5. **The procession:** The cardinals go in procession to the parvis of St. Peter's Square, followed by the pope.
6. **On the front altar:** The pallium, ring and Book of the Gospels are placed on the altar.
7. **The beginning:** The pope bows, turns around the altar and starts the celebration. The readings of the celebration include Isaiah 26:1-4 (first reading); Psalm 117; 1 Peter 5:1-5, 10-11 (second reading); and John 21:15-19 (the Gospel).
8. **The delivery of the symbols:** The cardinal hands over the pallium and ring to the pontiff, accompanied by the vice dean and the secretary of state.
9. **The pallium:** The pope blesses the Book of the Gospels and receives the pallium on his shoulders.
10. **The ring:** The cardinal slips the fisherman's ring on the ring finger of the pope's left hand.

Final rites and obedience

11. **Acclamation:** The pope blesses the Book of the Gospels toward the four directions; the choir and assembly sing.
12. **Rite of obedience:** The representatives of the Catholic Church pay homage to the new pope, including three first cardinals of each order (episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal); one bishop, one priest and one deacon; two superiors general (one male and one female); a married couple; and one boy

and one girl (each confirmed) from each continent.

13. **The "urbi et orbi" blessing:** At the end of the homily, Pope Leo XIV will impart the traditional blessing "to the city and the world."

The taking possession of the cathedra

A week later, on Sunday, May 25, at 5 p.m., Leo will take possession of the Roman "cathedra" (bishop's chair) at the Archbasilica of the Most Holy Savior and Sts. John the Baptist and John the Evangelist at the Lateran, known in Latin as "*Omnium urbis et orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput*," namely "Mother and head of all the churches in the city and the world."

The ceremony will formally complete the beginning of his papacy, symbolically reaffirming the bond between the pope and the Diocese of Rome.

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