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Pope Leo XIV smiles as he talks to visitors during his first weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 21, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Cindy Wooden

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The Gospel parable of the "wasteful sower" who casts seeds on fertile soil as well as on a rocky path "is an image of the way God loves us," Pope Leo XIV told visitors and pilgrims at his first weekly general audience.

The parable can strike people as odd because "we are used to calculating things — and at times it is necessary — but this does not apply in love," the pope told an estimated 40,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square May 21.

Leo read his full prepared text in Italian and also read the summaries of the talk in English and in Spanish.

At the end of the audience, Leo drew attention to ongoing Israeli military operations in Gaza and its limitations on the delivery of humanitarian aid to the area.

"The situation in Gaza is increasingly worrying and agonizing," he said. "I renew my heartfelt appeal to allow the entry of sufficient humanitarian aid and to end the hostilities, the heartbreaking price of which is being paid by children, the elderly and the sick."

The pope also told the crowd that he could not conclude the gathering without remembering "our beloved Pope Francis, who exactly one month ago returned to the house of our Father."

It had been more than three months since the Vatican hosted a weekly general audience; Francis met pilgrims and visitors Feb. 12 and was hospitalized two days later. He died April 21.

Mercy Sr. Maria Juan Anderson, coordinator of the Bishops' Office for U.S. Visitors to the Vatican, which is housed in the Casa Santa Maria of the Pontifical North American College in Rome, told Catholic News Service that the office distributed 1,800 free tickets to the pope's first audience — "a record!"

"We had eight priests hearing confessions for two and a half hours" as visitors came to collect their tickets May 20 and get information about the audience, the Vatican and the new pope, she said.

Leo arrived in the popemobile for the audience, riding through the crowd in St. Peter's Square and stopping often to bless infants, tracing the sign of the cross on their foreheads.

The pope began his audience explaining he would continue the series of talks his predecessor had begun on the Jubilee-related theme, "Jesus Christ Our Hope."

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Focusing specifically on the parable of the sower from the Gospel of Matthew 13:1-17, Leo said Jesus' parables were stories "taken from everyday life" but meant to lead listeners "to a deeper meaning."

The parable of the sower, he said, is about "the dynamic of the word of God and the effects it produces. Indeed, every word of the Gospel is like a seed that is thrown on the ground of our life."

The soil where the seed in the parable lands "is our heart, but it is also the world, the community, the church," he said. "The word of God, in fact, makes fruitful and provokes every reality."

What happens to the seed depends on the quality of the earth it lands on, he said.

"But first and foremost, in this parable Jesus tells us that God throws the seed of his word on all kinds of soil, that is, in any situation of ours," the pope said. "At times we are more superficial and distracted; at times we let ourselves get carried away by enthusiasm; sometimes we are burdened by life's worries, but there are also times when we are willing and welcoming."

"God is confident and hopes that sooner or later the seed will blossom," Leo said. "This is how he loves us: he does not wait for us to become the best soil, but he always generously gives us his word."

When people see how God loves and trusts them, the pope said, it should encourage them to be "better soil."

Leo urged people to ask God for the grace to welcome his word in their lives, "and if we realize we are not a fruitful soil, let us not be discouraged, but let us ask him to work on us more to make us become a better terrain."

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. [View the full series.](#)