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Pope Leo XIV waves to faithful as he arrives to celebrate a mass inside the St. Thomas of Villanova church in Castel Gandolfo, Sunday, July 13, 2025. (AP/Gregorio Borgia)

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CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy — July 14, 2025
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Pope Leo XIV called Sunday for "merciful compassion" for the world's poor, victims of tyranny and wars, as he celebrated Mass in a parish church that has special spiritual ties to Leo's own Augustinian religious order.

Leo is on vacation and resuming the papal tradition of summering at the papal estate of Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome, and celebrated Mass St. Thomas of Villanova church.

St. Thomas of Villanova was a 16th-century Spanish teacher who was a local and regional superior of the Augustinian order, a mendicant order inspired by the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo. The saint is the patron and namesake of Leo's alma mater outside Philadelphia, Villanova University, and is known for his care for the poor and for having given away his wealth to those in need.

In his homily, Leo offered a meditation on the biblical story of the Good Samaritan. Leo urged the faithful to be guided by empathy and be moved to act "with the same merciful compassion as God."

"How we look at others is what counts, because it shows what is in our hearts," he said. "We can look and walk by, or we can look and be moved with compassion."

That is especially true, he said, when looking at those who are "stripped, robbed and pillaged, victims of tyrannical political systems, of an economy that forces them into poverty, and of wars that kill their dreams and their very lives."

From his very first words as pope, Leo has repeatedly emphasized his identity as an Augustinian and infused his homilies and speeches with teachings from the 5th century theologian.

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Fr. Tadeusz Rozmus, the priest at St. Thomas of Villanova parish, has said the return of a pope to Castel Gandolfo has filled the town with joy. In an interview ahead of Leo's arrival last week, Rozmus also noted the spiritual connection of history's first Augustinian pope to the town.

"St. Thomas of Villanova was an Augustinian saint, and so with him (Leo) returns to the beginning of his history, of his spirituality," Rozmus said.

Leo is taking an initial two weeks of vacation in Castel Gandolfo, though he has already interrupted it to receive Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a group of religious superiors and to celebrate a special Mass dedicated to caring for God's creation.

He will go back to the Vatican at the end of July and then return for another spell in August.

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