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The Vatican Observatory sits atop Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome. (H. Raab/Wikipedia/Creative Commons)

by Associated Press

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Pope Leo XIV marked the 56th anniversary of man's arrival on the moon Sunday with a visit to the Vatican astronomical observatory in Castel Gandolfo and a call to astronaut Buzz Aldrin.

After praying the Sunday Angelus at his summer retreat in Castel Gandolfo, Leo headed to the astronomical observatory located in the Pontifical Villas, where he took a close look at the telescopes that have supported celestial exploration from a faith-based perspective for decades.

The pontiff was accompanied by astronomers and students participating in the traditional summer school organized by the observatory.

This was Leo's first visit to the observatory, founded in 1891 by Leo XIII. The first vision of it, however, can be traced back to the establishment by Pope Gregory XIII of a commission aimed at studying the scientific data and implications of the calendar reform that took place in 1582.

The Vatican Observatory has generated top-notch research from its scientist-clerics, drawing academics to its meteorite collection, which includes bits of Mars and is considered among the world's best.

Later Sunday, the pope called astronaut Buzz Aldrin, who shared with Neil Armstrong and Michael Collins the historic 1969 moonwalk.

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"This evening, 56 years after the Apollo 11 moon landing, I spoke with the astronaut Buzz Aldrin," Leo wrote on his X account. "Together we shared the memory of a historic feat, a testimony to human ingenuity, and we reflected on the mystery and greatness of Creation."

Leo then blessed the astronaut, his family and his collaborators.

There are a few precedents of papal calls to "space."

In 2011, Pope Benedict XVI rang the space station and asked about the future of the planet and the environmental risks it faced.

Before Benedict, Pope Paul VI sent a radio message to astronauts Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins after their moonwalk, calling them "conquerors of the Moon."

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