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Analysis



Pope Leo XIV catches a crocheted Pope Leo doll tossed to him as he rode in the popemobile around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 28, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Pope Leo XIV, elected May 8, reaches his 100th day in office on Aug. 16. During this time, he's been getting accustomed to his new, more public role as pontiff. But we've all also been getting to know him and his priorities for his papacy.

Not only have we seen some of his charism and theological inspirations, but we've also witnessed his care for carrying on the legacy of his predecessors and even his Midwestern sense of humor.

Here's a look back at the top 10 moments of the first pope from the United States.



Pope Leo XIV, the former Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, waves to the crowds in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican after his election as pope May 8, 2025. The new pope

was born in Chicago. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

1. Election/first address, May 8, 2025

"Peace be with you all!"

With those words, the first pope from the United States introduced himself to the world from St. Peter's Basilica.

His first address offers a glimpse into who Leo is as pope. He chose to dedicate much of his message to peace. He spoke of a peace that extends to all people in all parts of the world and from all backgrounds and a peace that "is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering."

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One thing about this initial greeting is that it gave us a foretaste of some themes that would continue throughout these early days of his pontificate: continuous calls for peace, looking back to his predecessors, proudly defining his identity as "a son of St. Augustine," and switching between languages.

First impressions are everything, and Leo's first address gave us a sneak peek into the man behind the white vestments.



Pope Leo XIV speaks with Jannik Sinner, the No. 1 rated tennis player in the world, May 14, 2025, during a meeting at the Vatican. Jannik gave a racket to the pope, who likes to play tennis. (CNS/Vatican Media)

2. Audience with Jannik Sinner, May 14: 'Here we'll break something. Best not to!'

There are a number of requirements to be elected pontiff. But losing your sense of humor is definitely not one of them. From the start of his papacy, Leo has shown that humor is an important part of the role.

In a private audience just six days after being elected, he met with famous Italian tennis player, Jannik Sinner. The two share a love and passion for tennis. Knowing this, the world's No. 1 player tried his luck at offering the pope a ball and suggesting they play. Rather than simply refusing, Leo responded lightheartedly: "Here we'll break something. Better not!"

Who knows, maybe in the future we'll see these two No. 1s in their respective fields play a match.

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3. Surprise visit to Augustinians, May 13

From the start, Leo made sure to stay true to his roots: from offering a special greeting in Spanish to his diocese in Peru to making a surprise visit to meet with the people who have been his family since 1977 — the Augustinians.

Just steps away from his new home inside the Vatican walls, the pope made the short trip to celebrate Mass and then eat lunch with the community — a routine that he lived by for 12 years when he served as prior general. This emphasized how seriously Leo meant his words: "I am a son of St. Augustine." At the core, he is an Augustinian.



Pope Leo XIV and Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri shake hands after exchanging remarks in Aracoeli Square in Rome May 25, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

4. Pope to Rome's mayor, May 25: 'For you and with you, I am a Roman'

The first few weeks on any job are a whirlwind of learning the ropes and adapting to the new way of life. For a pope, it also means building relationships with high-ranking officials and representatives.

But even as he met with the mayor of Rome, Roberto Gualtieri, Leo recognized who he was representing: the people of the Eternal City. So in addition to inviting the civic administrators and authorities to work with him to spread the Gospel and continue a legacy that has endured for two millennia, the pope also acknowledged the people he is to serve, placing himself — not above — but in the midst of them. He paraphrased the words of his beloved founder: "Today, I can say that for you and with you, I am a Roman."



Pope Leo XIV receives deep-dish pizza from Aurelio's in Chicago during an encounter at his general audience at the Vatican July 30, 2025. (NCR screengrab/YouTube/Vatican News)

5. General Audiences: Pope catches plush doll of himself May 28, and gets deep-dish Chicago pizza, July 30

At a general audience, anything can happen. From circus performances to children breaking free from their parents, things can definitely go off script.

Leo has experienced this firsthand during his audiences in St. Peter's Square.

Views on the first U.S. pope

Read our series of essays about the election of the first pope born in the U.S. NCR asked notable Catholics and Americans from various perspectives within the faith community to write about their hopes, dreams and expectations for Pope Leo XIV.

Closing on completing his first month as pontiff, Leo shocked many May 28 by catching a plush doll made in his likeness one-handed while riding in the popemobile. No flinching, no hesitation, just reminding everyone that he is an athlete (he has played tennis throughout his life).

Just about two months later, an encounter at a different general audience went viral as the pope received a deep-dish pizza all the way from Chicago. Traveling approximately 4,800 miles from Aurelio's (a longtime favorite of the pope) to Rome, a chain of friends wanted to bring a piece of home to the pope.



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican as they join him for the recitation of the Angelus prayer and an appeal for peace hours after the U.S. bombed nuclear enrichment facilities in Iran June 22, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

6. At Angelus prayer June 22, pope calls for an end to war, and in message the next week, he condemns starvation as war method

Leo's first 100 days have not only been marked with jokes and fun anecdotes, but also steps in building his priorities. On a number of occasions, he has reiterated a call for peace in the world and, in particular, for an end to violence and atrocities in Gaza and Ukraine.

Twice his words have more than called out the humanitarian crises taking place but left a deafening demand for action. Just hours after U.S. bombers hit nuclear enrichment facilities in Iran, and days after Iran and Israel carried out strikes on each other, the pope used his Angelus address on June 22 to express his concern for

the dramatic situation in Israel and Palestine. Amid the deaths and suffering from the violence, hunger and lack of basic human needs, he stressed, "Today more than ever, humanity cries out and pleads for peace." He urged responsibility and reason to reign rather than weapons.

Eight days later, he continued the demand for human dignity and rights to be protected. In a message to the Food and Agriculture Organization, he highlighted the "scandal of global hunger", due in part to countries at war. "Starving people to death," he condemned, "is a very cheap way to wage war."

Leo continues to not only call for an end to the violence that tears countries apart, but he also extends words of comfort and solidarity with those living through the horrors of war.



Pope Leo XIV greets people as he arrives in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, July 6, 2025, after reciting the Angelus at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

7. Pope welcomed into Castel Gandolfo, July 6

Can a tradition ever truly die? Well, after a 12-year hiatus of popes staying at Castel Gandolfo, Leo started his summer holidays in the Roman town and was welcomed with open arms and crowds of smiles.

Applause and chants erupted as he passed by locals who lined the streets awaiting his arrival.

His stay at the papal residence in the summer house signaled not only a nod back to a centuries-old custom but glimpse into who he might be as pope: reflective and intentional.



Pope Leo XIV greets visitors and pilgrims from the popemobile as he rides through St. Peter’s Square at the conclusion of an evening Mass celebrated by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, as part of the Jubilee of Youth at the Vatican July 29, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

8. Opening Mass of Jubilee of Youth, July 29: 'Your voices ... will be heard to the ends of the earth'

The moment everyone was expecting. Two of his predecessors faced similar challenges at the start of their papacy: a major event dedicated to young people (John Paul II with young people in 1979 in New York City and Francis at World Youth Day in 2013).

Now, Leo faced the Jubilee of Youth, bringing around 1 million young people from across the globe. All eyes were on him as he rode through the sea of people in and around St. Peter's Square after the opening Mass on July 29. And when he reached the platform in front of the Basilica, people waited eagerly to see if he would stick to a pre-written script or go off the cuff.

And he did not disappoint. He spoke from the heart in three languages: Spanish, Italian, and English, telling the young people that their voices and cries "will be heard to the ends of the earth!"

Leo urged the pilgrims to be the message of hope the world needs — the embodiment of the theme of this Jubilee Year. His words, his challenges were met with roaring cheers, ones that signaled the start of the pope's messages to the future of the world and of the church.



Pope Leo XIV waves to the crowd from the popemobile as he departs after celebrating a Mass concluding the Jubilee of Youth in Rome’s Tor Vergata neighborhood Aug. 3, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

9. At the end of Jubilee of Youth's closing Mass Aug. 3, Leo emphasizes solidarity with young people of Gaza and Ukraine, and later visits Spanish pilgrim in hospital

After celebrating with hundreds of thousands of young people at Tor Vergata — the same location of World Youth Day 2000 — Leo shifted to a more serious tone. He reminded the crowd Aug. 3 that while they were singing and praying, people their age across the world were fighting for their lives in places wracked with violence.

Expressing his solidarity with the young people of Gaza, Ukraine, and other countries in war, the pope highlighted that the pilgrims in Rome "are the sign that a different world is possible, a world of fraternity and friendship, where conflicts are not resolved with weapons but with dialogue." While there remains conflict and violence,

there is still hope.

The next day, he made a personal and surprise visit to the Bambino Gesù Pediatric Hospital in Rome to be with the family of Ignacio Gonzálvez, a 15-year-old Spanish pilgrim who came to participate in the Jubilee. He was admitted to the hospital after having complications from lymphoma. The pope prayed with the family, extending his blessing on them all.



Pope Leo XIV greets participants attending a conference on the ecumenical implications of the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea June 7, 2025, in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican. (CNS/Vatican Media)

10. Audience with participants of Council of Nicaea symposium, June 7: 'A lot of learning experiences'

While he carries the traditions and builds upon the foundations laid by a 2,000-year-old church, Leo is not shy of breaking through to people with a little humor.

After arriving late to an audience with participants in a symposium dedicated to the Council of Nicaea, rather than pretend it did not happen, the pope embraced his tardiness and offered his apology. He appealed to a shared human experience: adjusting to a new job. "I am not yet one month into the new job, so there are a lot of learning experiences."

And in that moment, we saw a glimpse into the character of this man from Chicago who became pope. He went from cardinal to a man learning his way around a new job and responsibility, emphasizing the importance of being patient with oneself.

With this milestone reached, the next phase of Leo's papacy begins as we continue to see where his journey leads and which moments will mark his top 10 of his first year as pope.

Related: In his 100 days as pope, Leo links climate, environment to broader global issues