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Pope Leo XIV shares a laugh with guests assisted by the Albano diocesan Caritas agency duri

Pope Leo XIV shares a laugh with guests assisted by the Albano diocesan Caritas agency during a luncheon at the Borgo Laudato Si' in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, Aug. 17, 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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Rome — August 17, 2025
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Spending the day with the poor, Pope Leo XIV prayed that Catholics would make sure their parishes are welcoming of all people and would be "on fire" with God's love.

"We are the church of the Lord, a church of the poor -- all precious, all active participants, each one bearing a unique word from God," the pope said Aug. 17 as he celebrated Mass at the Shrine of Santa Maria della Rotonda in Albano Laziale with about 110 clients and volunteers of the Diocese of Albano's Caritas programs, including people experiencing homelessness and residents of its shelter for families.

"Let us not leave the Lord outside of our churches, our homes or our lives," the pope said in his homily at the Mass. "Rather, let us welcome him in the poor -- and then

we will make peace even with our own poverty, the kind we fear and deny when we seek comfort and security at all costs."

After the morning Mass, Pope Leo returned to Castel Gandolfo -- less than two miles away -- to lead the recitation of the Angelus prayer and then to host lunch for the Caritas clients and some of the volunteers.

The luncheon was held in the Borgo Laudato Si', a project for education and training in integral ecology begun by Pope Francis in the gardens of the papal summer villa. Waiters in white shirts and black trousers served the guests a meal that included vegetable lasagna, eggplant parmesan or roast veal, fruit salad and dessert provided by local restaurants.

Cardinal Fabio Baggio, director general of Borgo Laudato Si', welcomed the pope said the lunch with the poor was a beautiful way to celebrate Pope Leo's first 100 days in office and affirm Catholic teaching that "unites care for creation with care for every person."

Pope Leo XIV gives his homily as he celebrates Mass with people assisted by the diocesan Ca

Pope Leo XIV gives his homily as he celebrates Mass with people assisted by the diocesan Caritas agency at the Shrine of Santa Maria della Rotonda in Albano Laziale, Italy, Aug. 17, 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

Pope Leo was seated at a round table placed at the junction of two long tables that formed an "l" under an awning to protect guests from the sun. At the table with him were: Rosabal Leon, a migrant from Peru, whose husband and two children were seated nearby; and Gabriella Oliveiro, 85, who lives by herself on the outskirts of Rome.

Before blessing the food, the pope said the setting was a reminder of the beauty of God's creation, especially God's creation of human beings in his image and likeness -- "all of us. Each one of us represents this image of God. How important it is to always remember that we find this presence of God in every person."

In his homily at the Mass, the pope had said that whether seeking assistance or providing it, in the church "each person is a gift for others. Let us tear down walls."

Pope Leo XIV reacts as a tray of food is served during lunch with guests assisted by the Alban

Pope Leo XIV reacts as a tray of food is served during lunch with guests assisted by the Albano diocesan Caritas agency at the Borgo Laudato Si’ in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, Aug. 17, 2025. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

Pope Leo thanked the people in Catholic communities around the world who "work to facilitate the encounter between people of different origins and economic, psychological or emotional situations: only together, only by becoming one body in which even the most fragile has full dignity, do we truly become the body of Christ, the church of God."

The day's Gospel reading, Luke 12:49-53, began with the words, "Jesus said to his disciples: 'I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!'"

The fire Jesus was speaking of, the pope said, was "not the fire of weapons, nor the fire of words that burn others down. No. But the fire of love -- a love that stoops to serve, that responds to indifference with care and to arrogance with gentleness; the fire of goodness, which doesn't cost like weapons do, but freely renews the world."

The price may be "misunderstanding, ridicule, even persecution, but there is no greater peace than having his flame within us," the pope said.

Pope Leo XIV greets lunch guests assisted by the Albano diocesan Caritas agency at the Borg

Pope Leo XIV greets lunch guests assisted by the Albano diocesan Caritas agency at the Borgo Laudato Si’ in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, Aug. 17, 2025. The luncheon with the pope followed a Mass the pope celebrated in nearby Albano Laziale. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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The Shrine of Santa Maria della Rotonda is built in the round on the site of a first-century pagan temple. The shape, Pope Leo said, "makes us feel welcomed into the womb of God."

"From the outside, the church, like every human reality, can appear rigid. But its divine reality is revealed when we cross its threshold and experience its welcome," the pope said. "Then our poverty, our vulnerability, and above all our failures -- for which we may be despised and judged, and sometimes we despise and judge ourselves -- are finally welcomed into the gentle strength of God, a love without sharp edges and without conditions."

"Mary, the mother of Jesus, is for us a sign and foretaste of God's maternity," he said. "In her, we become a motherly church, one that generates and regenerates not by worldly power, but by the virtue of charity."

Pope Leo prayed that Catholics would allow Jesus' fire to burn away "the prejudices, the caution and the fears that still marginalize those who carry the poverty of Christ written into their lives."