Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV appears at the window of his apartment in the Apostolic Palace to bless the faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican June 29. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

by Associated Press

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Pope Leo XIV asked people to fast on Friday to pray for peace and justice in the Middle East and Ukraine, issuing a special appeal as he returned to the Vatican from summer vacation. At the end of his weekly general audience Wednesday, Leo recalled that Friday is a special feast day dedicated to the Virgin Mary. He urged Catholic faithful to spend the day fasting and "praying that the Lord grants peace and justice, and dries the tears of all those who are suffering as a result of the armed conflicts underway." Leo has called for ceasefires in Gaza and Ukraine and for dialogue to achieve peace.

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Wednesday marked Leo’s first day back at the Vatican after a period of vacation at the papal summer retreat in Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome. Going forward, the pope has some important appointments including special audiences for the Vatican's 2025 Holy Year and the Sept. 7 canonization of the Catholic Church's first millennial saint Carlo Acutis. At the end of Wednesday's audience, Leo received a special gift: A Ping-Pong table decorated with his papal coat of arms. Leo, an avid tennis player, gamely picked up a paddle and bounced a ball on it, but the ball rolled into the net.