Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Francis greets immigrants as he arrives at the port in Lampedusa, Italy, July 8, 2013. (CNS/Tullio Puglia, pool)



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Pope Leo XIV said on Friday (Sept. 12) he hoped to visit the Sicilian island of Lampedusa, the site of his predecessor's first papal trip, "soon, in person."

Leo's comments came during a video praising the community of Lampedusa for its nomination to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage project.

The statement came amid much speculation and anticipation over the new pontiff's travel plans, which have yet to be officially announced. A trip to Turkey is expected to be announced to celebrate the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. In July, Leo told a Catholic-Orthodox pilgrimage from the United States that he had hoped to travel to Turkey for the anniversary.

Leo drew more speculation on Sept. 12 when he mentioned Lampedusa in a video message addressed to the island's inhabitants.

The message Francis preached during his July 8, 2013, visit set a tone for his young pontificate when he blasted what he called a "culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people."

It also highlighted Francis' commitment to migrants. During his visit, the pope celebrated a penitential Mass to mourn migrants lost at sea in search of a better future, lamenting that the world had neglected their plight.

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Leo expressed his gratitude to the community of Lampedusa, calling it the "gateway to Europe," and recalled how it welcomed the Word "amid great trials, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, thus becoming a model for all believers."

For years, Lampedusa has played a central role in Mediterranean illegal migration routes, serving as the first port of call for thousands of African migrants fleeing war and poverty from Northern and sub-Saharan Africa, but also as the tragic scene of

shipwrecks that have caused more than 25,000 deaths and deeply marked the European conscience over the past 10 years.

"Many migrant brothers and sisters have been buried in Lampedusa, and rest in the earth like seeds from which a new world wants to sprout," Leo said in the video.

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Leo said that the location of Lampedusa and Linosa, just 30 miles distant, "have always made you a gateway to Europe." He said that "in recent decades, this has required an enormous commitment to hospitality from your community, which has brought you from the heart of the Mediterranean to the heart of the church."

The pope said that Lampedusa's history makes it "an intangible but real heritage" and thanked the community for their witness.

Leo recalled the "many victims — and among them how many mothers and how many children! — [who] from the depths of the Mare Nostrum (Our sea) cry out not only to heaven, but to our hearts."

Leo said that "the globalization of indifference, which Pope Francis denounced starting from Lampedusa, seems today to have turned into a globalization of powerlessness" and called for "a culture of reconciliation" to oppose it.

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