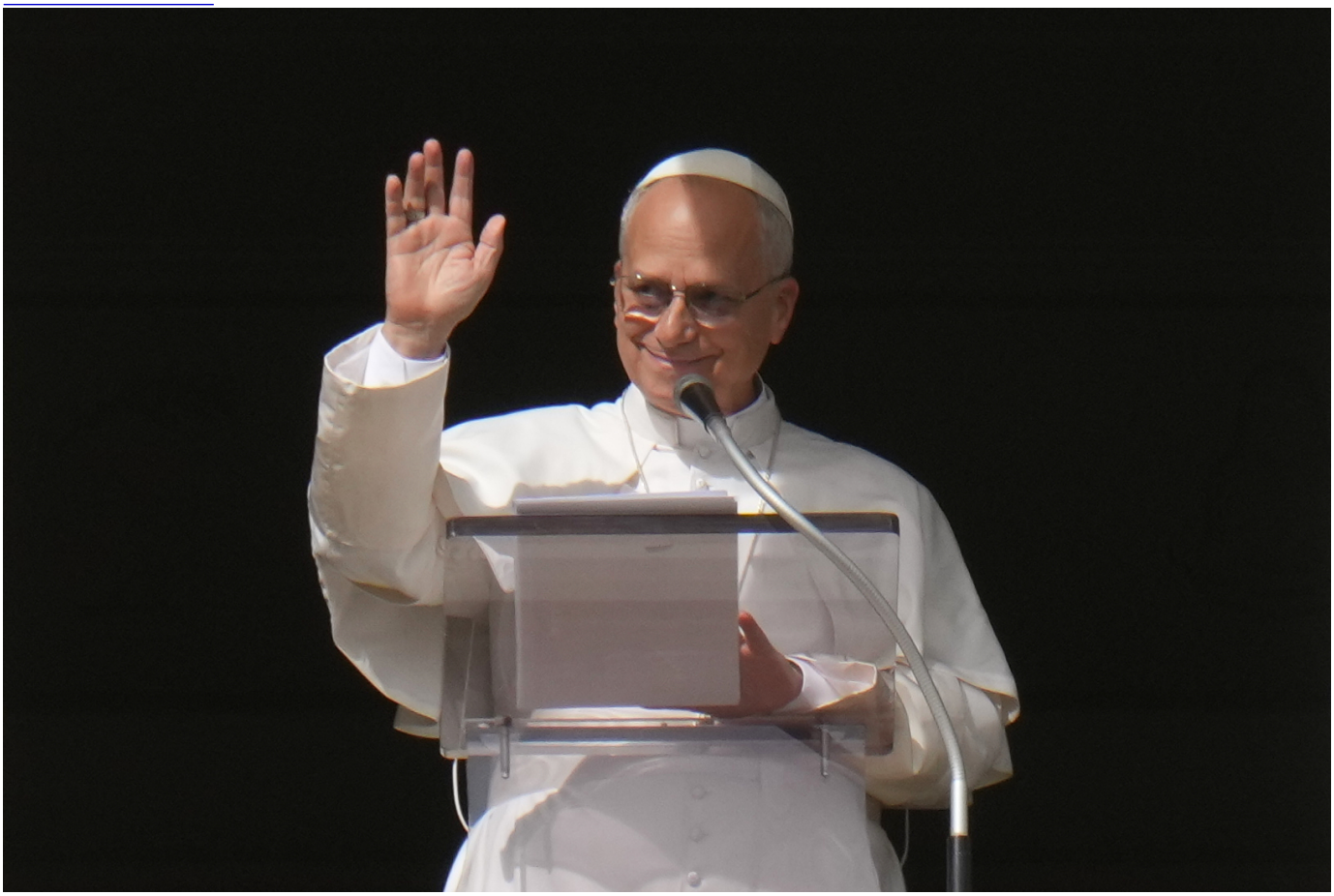
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Pope Leo XIV delivers his blessing as he recites the Angelus noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St.Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Sunday, Oct. 26, 2025. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

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Pope Leo XIV will pray at the site of the 2020 port blast in Beirut that killed over 200 people and compounded Lebanon's economic and political crisis during his first foreign trip as pope next month that will also take him to Turkey to mark an important anniversary with Orthodox Christians.

The Vatican on Monday released the itinerary of Leo's Nov. 27-Dec. 2 trip. It includes several moments for history's first American pope to speak about interfaith and ecumenical relations, as well as the plight of Christians in the Middle East and regional tensions overall.

Pope Francis had planned to visit both countries but died earlier this year before he could. He had particularly long wanted to go to Lebanon, but the country's economic and political crisis prevented a visit during his lifetime.

The main impetus for travelling to Turkey this year is to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, Christianity's first ecumenical council.

Leo made clear from the start of his pontificate that he would keep Francis' commitment, and has several moments of prayer planned with the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Bartholomew I.

Nicaea, today located in İznik on a lake southeast of Istanbul, is one of seven ecumenical councils that are recognized by the Eastern Orthodox. Leo will travel there by helicopter on Nov. 28 for a brief prayer near the archaeological excavations of the ancient Basilica of Saint Neophytos.

### A visit to the Armenian cathedral in Istanbul

Another significant moment in Turkey is Leo's Nov. 30 prayer at the Armenian apostolic cathedral in Istanbul. Francis didn't go there during his 2014 trip, but a year later he angered Turkey when he declared the slaughter of Armenians by Ottoman Turks the "first genocide of the 20th century."

Historians estimate that up to 1.5 million Armenians were killed by Ottoman Turks around the time of World War I, an event widely viewed by scholars as the first genocide of the 20th century. Turkey, however, has insisted that the toll has been inflated, and that those killed were victims of civil war and unrest, not genocide. It has fiercely lobbied to prevent countries, including the Holy See, from officially recognizing the Armenian massacre as genocide.

Leo has tended to avoid polemics during his first six months as pope, so it will be telling if he repeats Francis' characterization of the slaughter.

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**A prayer at site of Beirut port blast**

In addition to the traditional protocol visits with Turkish and Lebanese leaders, meetings with Catholic clergy and liturgies, Leo's visit to the site of the Aug. 4, 2020, Beirut port blast will likely be another stirring moment in his trip, coming on its final day.

The blast tore through the Lebanese capital after hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate detonated in a warehouse. The gigantic explosion killed at least 218 people, according to an AP count, wounded more than 6,000 others and devastated large swaths of Beirut, causing billions of dollars in damages.

Lebanese citizens were enraged by the blast, which appeared to be the result of government negligence, coming on top of an economic crisis spurred by decades of corruption and financial crimes. But an investigation into the causes of the blast repeatedly stalled, and five years on, no official has been convicted.

While Leo will celebrate Mass on the Beirut waterfront and travel to some areas near the Lebanese capital, his itinerary is significant for where he is not going: He will not visit Lebanon's south, battered by last year's war between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

**Places left off itinerary in both Lebanon and Turkey**

While the brunt of the destruction was concentrated in Shiite communities that form Hezbollah's main base of support, Christian communities were also impacted by the

conflict, with houses, agricultural land and even churches destroyed. Christians groups in southern Lebanon had lobbied for the pope to visit the area.

In Turkey, there are also no plans for Leo to visit the landmark Hagia Sophia monument in Istanbul as previous popes have done. The former Greek Orthodox patriarchal basilica, which was a mosque during Ottoman times, was a museum when Francis visited in 2014.

But in 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government changed its status from a museum back to a mosque and opened it up to Muslim worship. At the time, Francis said he was "deeply pained" by the decision.

Despite the renovations to preserve its historic domes, Hagia Sophia remains open to visitors and worshippers. Leo will visit the nearby Sultan Ahmed Mosque, popularly known as the Blue Mosque.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.