Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Leo XIV visits the Sultanahmet Mosque, known as the Blue Mosque, during his first apos

Pope Leo XIV visits the Sultanahmet Mosque, known as the Blue Mosque, during his first apostolic journey, in Istanbul, Turkey, Nov. 29. (OSV News/Reuters/Umit Bektas)



by Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — December 10, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Leo XIV pushed back against speculation surrounding his visit to Istanbul's iconic Blue Mosque during his recent trip to Turkey, but stopped short of saying whether he prayed there.

"Who said that I didn't pray?" the pope asked in response to a question posed by a reporter as he left the papal residence at Castel Gandolfo Dec. 9 to return to the Vatican.

"They said that I didn't pray, but I already gave a response on the airplane: I mentioned a book," he said, referring to *The Practice and Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence, which he cited on his return flight to Rome as representative of

his personal spirituality of giving one's life to God.

"It could be that I am praying right now," he continued. "As a matter of fact, I prefer to pray in a Catholic church in the presence of the most holy sacrament."

"That so much was made about that moment seemed to me a bit curious," he said.

> 'Who said that I didn't pray? … That so much was made about that moment seemed to me a bit curious.'
> —Pope Leo XIV
>
> Tweet this

Asgin Tunca, the muezzin of Istanbul’s Sultan Ahmed Mosque who is responsible for calling the faithful to prayer and led Leo through the building Nov. 29, told reporters after the visit that the pope declined an invitation to pray in the mosque.

"If you like to worship, you can worship here," he said he told the pope, "but he said, 'no, I am just going to look around,' " Tunca told journalists.

The Vatican later said that Leo lived his experience of the mosque "in a spirit of contemplation and listening."

Advertisement

An edited video of the visit released by the Vatican appeared to confirm Tunca’s account, with the muezzin audibly offering: "If you want, you can pray here," but Leo only continued to look around the mosque.

Both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis prayed at the Blue Mosque during their visits in 2006 and 2014, respectively. Benedict's visit marked only the second time a pope had entered a mosque, and afterward he thanked the imam "for this moment of prayer." Francis clasped his hands and stood in silent prayer for more than two minutes.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy greets Pope Leo XIV during a meeting at the papal

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy greets Pope Leo XIV during a meeting at the papal residence in Castel Gandolfo Dec. 9. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Pope: Trump's comments 'break apart' US-Europe alliance

After meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy earlier in the day, Leo told reporters that parts of the United States' proposed peace deal between Ukraine and Russia "make a huge change in what was, for many, many years, a true alliance between Europe and the United States."

The original peace deal proposed by President Donald Trump establishes an American-Russian working group on security issues in Ukraine without the involvement of Europe, and it appoints Trump to oversee the deal's implementation. Zelenskyy was expected to send his revisions to the peace deal to the United States on Dec. 10.

"Looking for a peace deal without including Europe in the conversations is not realistic, the war is in Europe," the pope said. "Europe should be a part of security guarantees that are sought today and in the future, unfortunately not everyone understands it that way."

The proposed peace deal "has a number of things in it that while many people in the United States would be in agreement, I think many others would see things in a different way," he continued.

Leo also addressed recent comments Trump made in a Politico interview in which he called Europe "weak" and "decaying" due to migration and "political correctness."

"The remarks that are made about Europe in interviews recently are trying to break apart what I think needs to be a very important alliance today and in the future," Leo said.

On the war in Ukraine, the pope said he and Zelenskyy spoke at length about how the church can help return children to Ukraine that were taken into Russia, which was a priority for the Vatican's diplomatic involvement in the war developed under Pope Francis.

The National Catholic Reporter's Rome Bureau is made possible in part by the generosity of Joan and Bob McGrath.