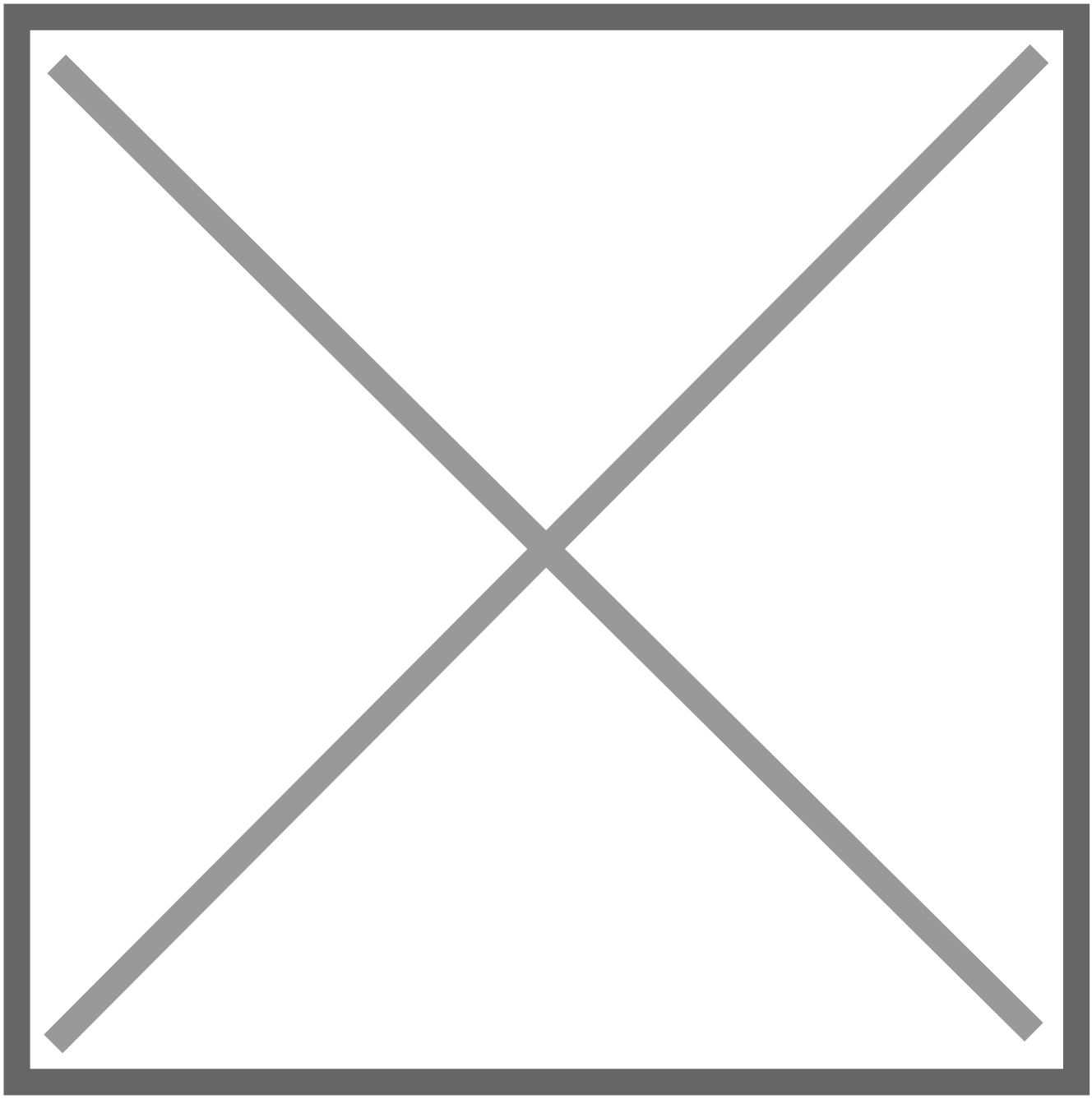
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Pope Leo XIV waves to onlookers as he leaves an ecumenical Christian prayer service inside Rome's Colosseum Oct. 28, 2025. Leo will carry the cross himself April 3, 2026, through all 14 stations of the Way of the Cross at Rome's Colosseum on the first Good Friday of his pontificate. (OSV News/Vatican Media)

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Pope Leo XIV will carry the cross himself through all 14 stations of the Way of the Cross at Rome's Colosseum on the first Good Friday of his pontificate.

It will be the first time that a pope has carried the cross for every station in the Via Crucis since the tradition was revived at the site more than six decades ago.

The 70-year-old pope's predecessors Pope Benedict XVI and St. John Paul II carried the cross only at the opening and closing of the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum. Pope Francis presided over the Via Crucis from the nearby Palatine Hill and in his final years did not attend at all due to declining health.

In 1756, Pope Benedict XIV dedicated the Colosseum to the memory of the passion of Christ and the early Christian martyrs, and the Stations of the Cross were regularly prayed in the Colosseum for about 100 years in the 18th and 19th centuries. St. John XXIII restored the Via Crucis tradition to the Colosseum with St. Paul VI making it a regular tradition in Rome.

The meditations for this year's papal Stations of the Cross were written by Franciscan Fr. Francesco Patton, who served as custos of the Holy Land from 2016 to 2025. Often writing from Mount Nebo in Jordan, Patton has been a consistent voice on behalf of those suffering amid conflict and instability across the Middle East. The

Holy See Press Office has said the texts will be published on the morning of Good Friday, April 3.

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Last year's Via Crucis meditations were written by the late Francis following a prolonged hospitalization at Rome's Gemelli Hospital, though he was ultimately unable to attend the Colosseum ceremony due to his health.

Leo is also reviving another papal tradition for Holy Week on Holy Thursday, celebrating a public Mass of the Lord's Supper at the Basilica of St. John Lateran, including the traditional washing of feet.

Francis had broken with the practice of a public Holy Thursday papal Mass, choosing instead to celebrate the liturgy at prisons and wash the feet of inmates. Leo's return to St. John Lateran restores the public Easter Triduum liturgies to their traditional setting for the first time in years.