News

U.S. President Donald Trump answers questions from the media during a news conference ab

U.S. President Donald Trump answers questions from the media during a news conference about Iran April 6. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine listen as he speaks. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)



by Brian Fraga

Staff Reporter

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

April 7, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Catholics across the ideological spectrum, including Pope Leo XIV, expressed alarm and condemned President Donald Trump's threat that "a whole civilization will die tonight" unless Iran strikes a deal with the United States by 8 p.m. Eastern on April 7.

Leo XIV called the threats "truly unacceptable" and said that such attacks would violate international law. In some of his strongest comments yet against the war, Leo urged Americans and others to demand that political leaders reject war and work for peace.

"Today as we all know there was this threat against all the people of Iran. This is truly unacceptable," he said as he left his country house in Castel Gandolfo, according to The Washington Post.

Leo on Easter appealed for peace and rejected war. He will lead a prayer vigil for peace on April 11 at St. Peter's Basilica.

On April 7, the pope urged people to contact their political leaders and congressional representatives and to remind them that attacks on civilian infrastructure are "against international law" and a "sign of the hatred, the division, the destruction human beings are capable of, and we all want to work for peace," according to the Post.

Theologians, priests, academics, authors, media personalities, bishops and others took to social media platforms April 7 to warn that military strikes on civilian targets and infrastructure in Iran would constitute grave evils and violate the Catholic Church's just war tradition.

"Unfortunately, if President Trump carries out his threat, two civilizations will die and humanity will be left wounded," Archbishop Luis Argüello of Valladolid, Spain, wrote on X.

Argüello, who has served as president of the Spanish Episcopal Conference since 2024, called on Catholics to pray for peace. He also said that the "end, which in this case is not even good, never justifies the means."

Also writing on X, Fr. John Naugle, a Catholic writer who serves as a priest in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, said Trump's rhetoric was "indefensible" and "satanic." Leah Libresco Sargeant, a Catholic author, wrote that "American soldiers must refuse orders to commit war crimes."

In an April 7 post on his Truth Social platform, Trump warned that civilization in Iran would end, "never to be brought back again," if the Iranian regime did not meet his demands to reopen the Strait of Hormuz amid the bombing campaign that the United States and Israel have been waging since Feb. 28.

"I don't want that to happen, but it probably will," said Trump, who made similar comments during a White House press briefing on April 6, when he told journalists that "the entire country can be taken out in one night, and that night might be tomorrow night."

The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times reported on April 7 that Iran had cut off direct communications with the U.S. over Trump's threat to destroy the country's "whole civilization."

On social media, Trump held out hope that "less radicalized minds" would prevail and that "maybe something revolutionarily wonderful can happen."

"WHO KNOWS? We will find out tonight, one of the most important moments in the long and complex history of the World," Trump wrote.

That bellicose rhetoric prompted Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to release a statement urging Trump to "step back from the precipice of war and negotiate a just settlement for the sake of peace and before more lives are lost."

"The threat of destroying a whole civilization and the intentional targeting of civilian infrastructure cannot be morally justified. There are other ways to resolve conflict between peoples," said Coakley, who underscored Pope Leo XIV's recent calls for peace in the Middle East.

Advertisement

Sharing Trump's ominous post on her public Facebook page, Holly Taylor Coolman, a theologian at Providence College, said it was "impossible to be 'pro-life' and express this level of glee about death."

"God have mercy," Simcha Fisher, a Catholic writer, also said on Facebook in reference to Trump's social media post.

Charlie Camosy, a moral theologian, wrote on X that "war crimes are war crimes, regardless of who commits them." He added that U.S. military personnel "should refuse to participate in war crimes."

Catholic theologian Michael Lofton also took to X to criticize faith leaders who he said "have failed" to confront Trump.

"Blood will be on their hands if this deranged man murders civilians tonight," Lofton wrote.

Christopher Hale, a Catholic who has previously run for Congress as a Democrat, wrote on X that "no Catholic can support" Trump. Hale, who runs the Letters from Leo blog, also said it was time for Catholics to stand together against Trump's "tyrannical regime."

Criticisms also came from traditionalist and conservative-leaning Catholics on social media.

"If [Trump] issues such an order, it will be the duty of military leaders to refuse to comply," Robert George, a Catholic and conservative legal professor at Princeton University, wrote on X.

Edward Feser, a Catholic philosopher, described Trump's social media post as "an unspeakably evil threat."

"Every soldier has the duty to disobey orders to carry this out, every government official has the duty to do whatever is in his power to stop it, every [churchman] has the duty to speak out against it, every citizen to resist in any moral way possible," Feser wrote on X.

Candace Owens, a Catholic convert and controversial right-wing influencer who often dabbles in conspiracy theories, called for Trump to be removed from office via the 25th Amendment. Trump, Owens wrote, is "a genocidal lunatic."

E. Michael Jones, a traditionalist Catholic writer who has espoused antisemitic views, said the time "had come for the military to refuse to cooperate with orders like this." Eric Sammons, the editor in chief of Crisis Magazine, a right-wing Catholic publication, wrote that Trump's actions were helping to lead our (already dying) civilization to its grave."

In his prepared statement, Coakley mentioned Leo's uopcoming peace vigil. He said: "I make a special plea to my brother bishops, the priests, the laity, and all people yearning for true peace to join the Holy Father's Vigil for Peace, whether virtually, or in parishes, chapels, or before the Lord present in the quiet of their hearts to join with our Holy Father as we pray for peace in our world."

Read this next: Archbishop Broglio: War in Iran likely not justified under Catholic teaching on legitimate defense
This story appears in the **War in Iran** feature series. View the full series.