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Pope Leo XIV prays during a visit to the archaeological site of Hippo in Annaba, Algeria, April

Pope Leo XIV prays during a visit to the archaeological site of Hippo in Annaba, Algeria, April 14, 2026. The site represents the ancient city where St. Augustine, the founder of the pope's religious order, served as bishop in the 4th century. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Annaba, Algeria — April 14, 2026
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Preaching from the Basilica of St. Augustine, dedicated to the figure to whom he has modeled his spiritual life, Pope Leo XIV laid out his vision for the Catholic Church animated by the North African saint's example of conversion.

"In the face of poverty and oppression, the guiding principle above all for Christians is charity," he said on a hilltop overlooking the site of ancient Hippo, the Roman city where St. Augustine lived, prayed and ministered to his flock as a bishop for 34 years. "Let us do to those around us, as we would have them do to us."

The pope began his second day in Algeria on April 14 with a visit to Hippo's ruins under a steady stream of rain rare in the predominantly desert nation. The visit was the centerpiece of his two days in Algeria where Leo, the first Augustinian pope, wanted to pay homage to his spiritual father and, in the process, become the first pope to visit the North African nation.

Upon arriving at the site, where scattered columns rise from the grass in the shadow of the towering basilica above, Leo laid a wreath of flowers, then crossed his hands and stood in silence for several moments bearing a solemn expression. He then planted at the site an olive tree, a sign of peace, using a shovel.

The pope has been associated with the Augustinians since he attended a minor seminary run by the order in Holland, Michigan. "So much of who I am I owe to the spirit and the teachings of St. Augustine," he said in a message to members of the order in August.

Traveling with the pope in Algeria was the head of the Augustinian order and Leo's longtime friend Fr. Joseph Farrell.

> 'Faith unites people according to perfect justice, which calls everyone to charity.'
> —Pope Leo XIV
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After visiting with the local Augustinian religious community — the order has three friars in Muslim-majority Algeria — the pope celebrated Mass with some 1,500 people in the basilica where a statue of St. Augustine stands by the altar. Many in attendance were African Catholics who had migrated to Algeria or had traveled there from neighboring nations for the pope's visit.

In his homily in Annaba, Leo held out the saint as a model for renewal in the church and the world and said the doctor of the church is revered "for his conversion even more than for his wisdom."

Augustine famously recounted in his *Confessions* the personal story of his transition from a hedonistic lifestyle that included fathering a child with his concubine, to his striking conversion in Milan, which eventually led to becoming a bishop and one of

the greatest intellectual influences in Western thought.

Discussing Augustine's reflections on the heart central to the saint's spirituality, the pope said that reform in the church "must begin in the heart" and "encompass everyone if it is to be effective."

Leo said Christians must strive for unity and pointed to the first Christians as a model of church that "was not based on a social contract, but rather on the harmony of faith, affections, ideas and life decisions centered on the love of God who became man to save all the peoples of the earth."

Pope Leo XIV celebrates Mass with some 1,500 people at the Basilica of St. Augustine in Anna

Pope Leo XIV celebrates Mass with some 1,500 people at the Basilica of St. Augustine in Annaba, Algeria, April 14, 2026. Many in attendance were African Catholics who had migrated to Algeria or had traveled there from neighboring nations for the pope's visit. (OSV News/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)

The pope reflected at length on the Mass' first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which said the "community of believers was of one heart and mind."

"Faith," Leo said, "unites people according to perfect justice, which calls everyone to charity."

"The primary task of pastors as ministers of the Gospel is therefore to bear witness to God before the world with one heart and one soul, not permitting our concerns to lead us astray through fear, nor trends to undermine us through compromise," he said.

Pope Leo XIV is assisted by a Boy Scout as he visits the archaeological site of Hippo Regius in

Pope Leo XIV is assisted by a Boy Scout as he visits the archaeological site of Hippo Regius in Annaba, Algeria, April 14, 2026. He planted an olive tree, a sign of peace, at the site. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

Pope Francis likewise highlighted the church modeled in the Acts of the Apostles "as the paradigm for every Christian community, as the icon of a fraternity."

Leo has made unity a central tenet of his 11-month pontificate, preaching

repeatedly on the theme and often drawing from Augustine in doing so.

His papal motto, "*In illo uno unum*" ("In him all are one"), was taken from Augustine's writings.

Advancing Francis' legacy

As Leo laid out how Augustine informs his view of the future of the church, the Vatican published a letter the pope had sent to all of the world's cardinals on advancing the church's mission.

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After convening the world's cardinals to Rome in January to discuss the church's priority, the pope said that *Evangelii Gaudium*, the roadmap of Francis' pontificate which articulated his vision for the church, "continues to be a significant point of reference."

The pope, who spent more than two decades as a missionary in Peru, wrote in the April 12 letter that the cardinals' reflections on the document in January indicate "a shift from a pastoral approach of maintenance to one of mission."

"At the diocesan level, the responsibility of pastors to resolutely support missionary boldness emerges clearly, ensuring that such boldness is not weighed down or stifled by organizational excesses, but is guided by a discernment that helps us to recognize what is essential," he wrote.

The world's cardinals are set to meet again in June, where the pope wrote that, among other topics, they would discuss reassessing how the church communicates "from a more explicitly missionary perspective."

And as Leo continues through his 11-day trip into sub-Saharan Africa, the pope will tap into his missionary roots, preaching to burgeoning Catholic communities in the Global South that will increasingly comprise a greater proportion of the church.

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This story appears in the **Leo XIV in North and Central Africa** feature series. View the full series.