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Pope Leo XIV arrives to celebrate Mass in Piazza Bartolo Longo in Piazza Bartolo Longo in front of the Pontifical Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary of Pompeii near Naples, Italy, May 8, 2026, on the first anniversary of his election as the first U.S.-born pontiff. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)



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Rome — May 8, 2026
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Pope Leo XIV celebrated the first anniversary of his election to the papacy at a Marian shrine in southern Italy, repeating the calls for peace he made on the day he was elected pope 12 months ago.

"Exactly one year ago, when I was entrusted with the ministry of the successor of Peter, it was precisely on the feast of the Supplication to Our Lady, this beautiful Feast of the Supplication to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary of Pompeii," the pope said before a 19th century church outside of Naples. "I therefore had to come here to place my ministry under the protection of the Blessed Virgin."

The pope's visit to Pompei and Naples is part of a sweeping tour of Italian daytrips he will make throughout 2026, including a July 4 visit to the island hotspot of Lampedusa visited by Pope Francis in his first trip outside of Rome.

On the first anniversary of his election in 1979, St. John Paul II likewise visited the Marian shrine at Pompei which contains an image venerated throughout Italy of Jesus and Mary gifting rosaries to Sts. Dominic and Catherine of Siena. In his homily, Leo recalled how the Polish pope proclaimed a Year of the Rosary in 2002, which he concluded with a pilgrimage to the shrine.

"The times since then have not improved," Leo said in his homily to an estimated 20,000 people gathered in the church square.

"The wars still being fought in so many regions of the world call for a renewed commitment that is not only economic and political, but also spiritual and religious," he said. "Peace is born within the heart."

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Leo recalled John Paul II's 1986 gathering of religious leaders in Assisi to pray for peace, noting that he and Pope Francis had likewise called on the world's faithful to pray for peace.

"We cannot resign ourselves to the images of death that the news presents to us every day," he said.

Invoking the intercession of Mary, the pope prayed that "there come from the God of peace an overflowing outpouring of mercy, touching hearts, calming resentments and fratricidal hatreds, and enlightening those who have special responsibilities of government."

"Brothers and sisters, no earthly power will save the world, but only the divine power of love — this divine power of love that Jesus, the Lord, has revealed to us and given us," Leo continued.

After his election on May 8, 2025, Leo proclaimed "a peace that is unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering" in his first public address from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. He also recalled the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii and asked the faithful in the square below him to invoke Mary's intercession "for this new mission, for the whole church, for peace in the world."

In Pompei, the pope also noted that the papal name he chose for himself one year ago "places me in the footsteps of Pope Leo XIII, who, among his other merits, also developed an extensive teaching on the Holy Rosary."

Leo XIII published numerous encyclicals on the rosary and promoted its devotion within the church, consecrating the month of October to the prayer of the rosary.

Last month, the pope presided over a prayer vigil for peace at St. Peter's Basilica where he prayed the rosary, and issued some of his strongest language against those waging war.

"Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war!" he said then.

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