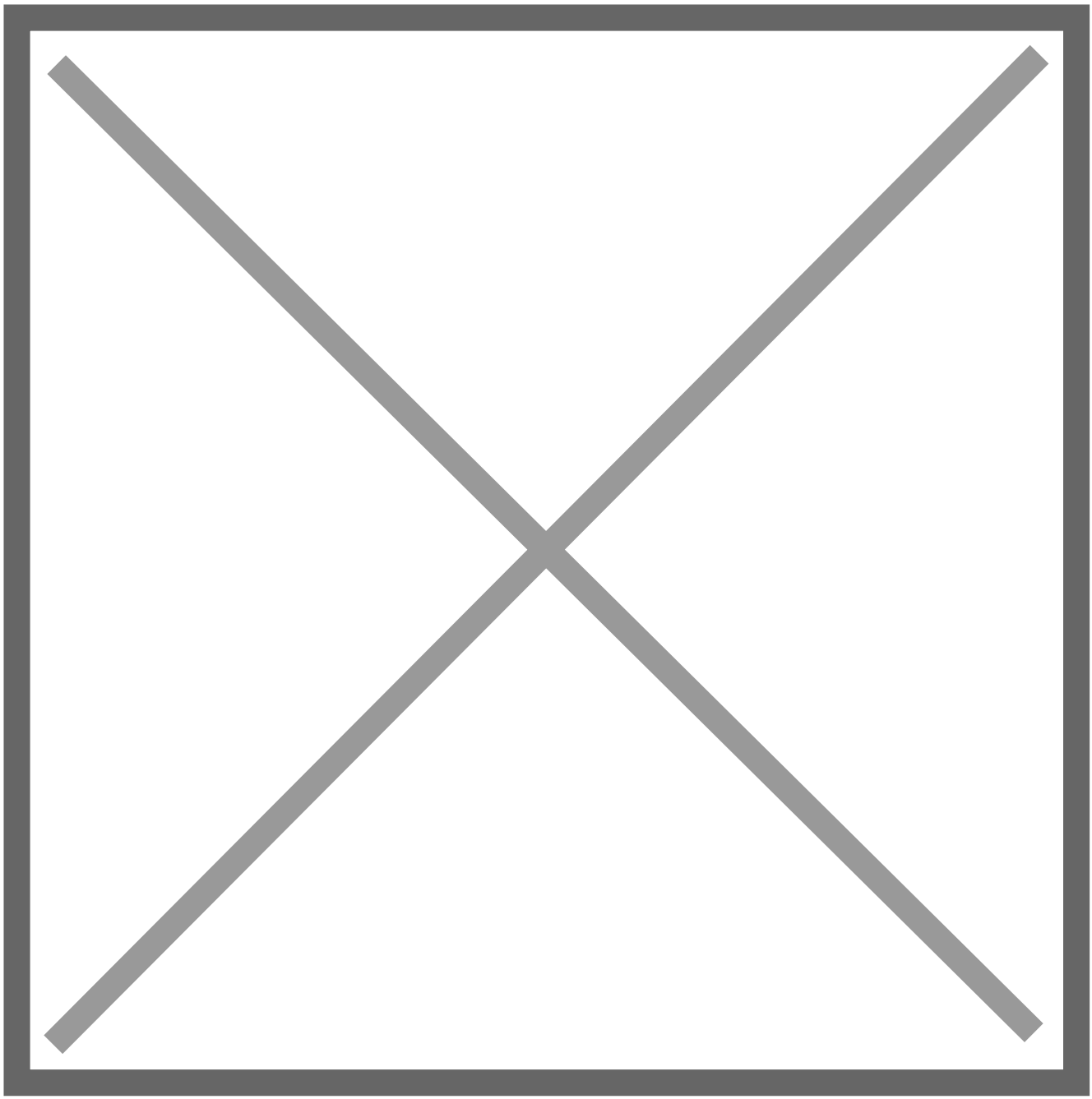
News



Augustinians priests concelebrate a Mass of thanksgiving for the first anniversary of their brother Pope Leo XIV’s papacy at St. Jude Catholic Church in New Lenox, Ill., May 8, 2026. Among the concelebrants is Passionist Fr. Enzo Del Brocco, second from left. (OSV News/Simone Orendain)



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NEW LENOX, Ill. — May 13, 2026
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Pope Leo XIV's brother Augustinians and others from the Chicago-area looked back with gratitude on the past year since the election of one of their own at a special Mass May 8.

Augustinians of the Midwest and Spain-based Augustinian sisters living in the Chicago area attended the thanksgiving Mass for the pope's first year at St. Jude Catholic Church in New Lenox, just southwest of Chicago. The Augustinian-run parish is where Pope Leo XIV last visited the U.S., in August 2024, when he was still Cardinal Robert F. Prevost.

"How blessed we are and how fortunate we are and I know that many of us at some point in time have met him, have talked with him, have spent time with him. Now, not a lot of people can say that about the pontiff," said Augustinian Fr. Anthony Pizzo at the opening of the Mass. Pizzo is the outgoing superior of the Midwest Augustinians, a position the pope once held.

Five Augustinians and Passionist Fr. Enzo Del Brocco, president of Catholic Theological Union, where Leo received his master's of divinity, concelebrated the

Mass. Among them was Fr. John Lydon, the pope's longtime friend from college and his missionary days in Peru. The Augustinian priest and the future pope lived in Trujillo for 10 years — in the tumultuous 1990s beset with political instability — teaching and guiding Augustinian seminarians.

In his homily, Lydon recalled the pope's first anniversary visit that day to Pompeii, Italy, on the feast of Our Lady of Pompeii — a site that he said brought about conversion, miracles and "much hope." Lydon also noted that the same day in the Augustinian tradition honors Our Lady of Grace, the patron of the Augustinians in Peru.

The readings for the Marian feasts, and St. Paul's letter to the Galatians saying we are no longer slaves but sons of God, he said, "help us understand the ministry and mission of Pope Leo."

After the Mass, Lydon told OSV News his first thoughts on the first year since his good friend's election to the papacy were "of gratitude to the Lord" for "the gift of Pope Leo."

"His spirit is what guided the cardinals to choose our supreme pontiff," he said. Referring to Leo, he added, "We need his moral guidance, his moral voice in our world of today. And he has courageously stepped up to that."

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Lydon said "it's hard to believe it's been a whole year" since the pope was elected, "but it's just a sign of God's infinite grace to us all ... and although the storm clouds look strong, we are assured that the Son, S-o-n, breaks through and Pope Leo helps direct us to him."

Augustinian Fr. Ray Flores, pastor of St. Jude and a close friend of John Prevost, one of the pope's two older brothers, said that "it's been a privilege ... when I think of accompanying John to different interviews throughout the year" to get to know the pope better, "which I really have enjoyed."

"We both want to share the good news of his brother, and Pope Leo, and the Augustinians, and the message of peace that Pope Leo from day one has been talking about so beautifully and articulately," he said. "People want that."

Formerly a diocesan priest, Flores entered the Order of St. Augustine in 2017, when Leo was then Bishop Prevost of the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru. He knew the pope to be friendly whenever he greeted him and got to know him better four years ago while serving with him at the parish. One of the first parishioners Flores met at St. Jude in January 2023 was John Prevost.

Fresh from a trip to New York for an interview with CNN, John Prevost attended the Mass but kept a low profile from news media, after a whirlwind year of regularly giving interviews.

In the vestibule outside the sanctuary of St. Jude, people who attended the Mass chatted with the Augustinians and one another. The phrase "we're so blessed" could be heard over and over again.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV's First Year** feature series. View the full series.