



Pope Leo XIV incenses the relics of St. Augustine as he visits the San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro Basilica in Pavia, northern Italy, June 20, 2026. (AP/Luca Bruno)

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Pavia, Italy — June 20, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV encouraged Italians June 20 to rediscover their lagging Catholic faith during a visit to northern Italy where he prayed before the relics of St. Augustine, the intellectual giant of the early Christian church and inspiration of his religious spirituality.

Leo traveled by helicopter to Pavia, near Milan, where the remains of the fifth-century saint are kept. Leo prayed quietly before the small gold-rimmed glass box containing the remains that had been brought to the altar of the San Pietro in Ciel d'Oro basilica for the occasion.

Leo's day trip, during which he was also due to honor the first American saint, Mother Frances Cabrini, marked the midway point of his summer 2026 grand tour of Italy. The American pope has scheduled a series of Saturday day trips up and down the peninsula and its islands to get to know his new flock.

The visit to Pavia was a required stop for history's first Augustinian pope. Leo proclaimed himself a "son of St. Augustine" on the night of his election and has cited Augustine prolifically in his first year, making clear that the saint is the guiding inspiration of his pontificate.

[Related: What is Augustinian spirituality? A priest \(and friend of Pope Leo\) explains](#)

In his remarks to the faithful in the basilica, Leo urged Italians to discover or rediscover their faith and pointed to Augustine as a model. Like many once-Christian strongholds in Europe, Italy has seen its churches empty in recent years amid secularizing trends, with fewer and fewer Italians getting married in the church or going to Mass regularly.

"At a time when many people seem to have lost their spiritual appetite or, for various reasons, no longer find the Christian faith appealing for their lives, we are called first and foremost to proclaim the Gospel," Leo said.

He pointed to [Augustine as a source of inspiration for today's faithful](#).

Augustine was born in 354 in what is today Algeria, but he lived for five years in and around Milan, where he converted to Christianity. He later became a bishop, developed a rule for monastic life and wrote some of the most important works of Western thought, including *Confessions* and *The City of God*.

"His thought, the story of his conversion, and his spirituality remind us of the value and primacy of interiority," of finding meaning inside oneself, Leo said.



Pope Leo XIV is greeted as he arrives at Pavia, northern Italy, June 20, 2026.
(AP/Luca Bruno)

Later June 20, Leo is due to visit nearby Sant'Angelo Lodigiano, the birthplace of Mother Frances Cabrini, the patron saint of migrants. Cabrini is well-known to many Americans for her work [caring for Italian immigrants](#) in the United States at the turn of the last century.

After she died in 1917, as a naturalized U.S. citizen in Leo's native Chicago, Cabrini was beatified. In 1946, she was made a saint by Pope Pius XII, the first from the United States. In a radio message that year, Pius called her a "heroine of modern times."

Just last year, Leo's alma mater, Villanova University outside Philadelphia, opened a new campus named for Cabrini and a special Institute on Immigration inspired by her service to migrants.

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As the late Pope Francis did before him, Leo has embraced the Catholic Church's Gospel-mandated call to "welcome the stranger" in his ministry to migrants. Last week, Leo spent two days in Spain's Canary Islands, a major destination for migrants leaving West Africa, where [he called for welcoming and integrating those fleeing hardship and conflict](#).

Leo's next day trip is on July 4, when he heads to Lampedusa, the Sicilian island that is a major destination for migrants fleeing North Africa for Italy.

History's first U.S.-born [pope has clashed with the Trump administration over its crackdown on migrants and mass deportation program](#), giving added symbolic significance to Leo's decision to spend July 4 — U.S. Independence Day — in Lampedusa, which was where Francis chose to make his first trip outside Rome as pope, in 2013.

Nicole Winfield reported from Rome.