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Pilgrims are seen leaving a packed train July 12, 2026, as they arrive at Castel Gandolfo, Italy, ahead of Pope Leo XIV's Sunday Angelus. (OSV News photo/Jan Guzik)

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CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy — July 13, 2026
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When the 8:21 a.m. train left Rome's Termini Station to Castel Gandolfo July 12, people packed like sardines into the regional cars. While two or three passengers got off at stations along the way, most disembarked at Castel Gandolfo and headed up the hill to see Pope Leo XIV during the Sunday Angelus prayer — the first this summer to be said from his lakeview residence.

One of those squeezed into the regional Italian train heading to Lake Albano was Jana Kopkova from Koshice, Slovakia.

"We're in Rome for an extended weekend so we wanted to see the pope with our family," she said, her 7-year-old boy clinging to his mother's leg as they stood on the train, nodding his head with a smile when asked by OSV News if he was excited to meet the pope.

"Pope Leo is just so natural," Kopkova, whose cousin is an Augustinian friar, told OSV News.

"He looks like he was born to bless all those babies," she said with a smile, happy for the summer adventure and an opportunity to get the papal blessing for her family.

It was the family's first time to see the pope in the summer setting.

It was a similar case for Kevin's family. They came from Colombia — Kevin, with his parents and two sisters.

"We're Catholics so it was important for us to be here," he told OSV News, as his sisters sheltered themselves from the sun under their umbrellas.

The Augustinian pope did not disappoint pilgrims waiting in the July Italian sun at Castel Gandolfo town square, delivering a reflection in a relaxed mood during his summer vacation.

"Brothers and sisters, happy Sunday!" He started to the cheers of those gathered.

Reflecting on the parable of the sower in the Gospel of Mathew, the pope said it "describes the generosity and trust with which God sows his word in our hearts and his power in us."

Jesus himself "is the seed," the pope said.

"It is true that sometimes he finds in us hard and unresponsive soil," but when the Lord "finds receptive and fertile ground," then "miracles of love are set in motion that have the power to transform everything."

The Father "never ceases to sow, because he knows that the power of his love is stronger than our weakness," Leo said.

"God's generosity towards us is not naive but wise. He sees within us the potential of a good that, at times, we ourselves might fail to recognize. For this reason, the Lord, who knows the soil of our hearts better than we, never ceases to believe in us — in who we are and in who we can become, day by day, if we entrust ourselves to him in faith," the pope said.

Encouraging those gathered — most of them enjoying their summer breaks — to recharge their batteries remembering about God, Leo said, "Let us ... resolve, especially during these summer days of vacation, to make room for listening to, reading, and meditating on the word of God, thereby fostering — together with rest and wholesome recreation — meaningful moments of silence and prayer."

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In this way, the pontiff stressed, "we shall return to our usual activities renewed in body and spirit, ready to proclaim the good news of the Gospel and ever more capable of contributing to the growth of the kingdom of God."

The pope prayed the Angelus standing at the gate of the Castel Gandolfo residence and used a small, motorized buggy cart to drive standing through the square and greet pilgrims after the Sunday prayer.

Luigi, who lives close to Castel Gandolfo, told OSV News while heading to Sunday Mass at the parish Church of St. Thomas of Villanova, "It's a great joy to have the pope back, answering our desire to have him close."

Elia, with a big smile on her face as she sold magnet after magnet in her souvenir shop at the piazza, agreed: "We are just so happy," she said, adding, "So many people now come to Castel Gandolfo."

Castel Gandolfo lets pilgrims have a much more intimate experience of the pope than when he's meeting his flock in Vatican City. The town's square is tiny compared to St. Peter's Square and the numbers of people are also much smaller.

It is worth considering an early arrival to Castel Gandolfo — either by train or bus from Rome. On July 12, buses were so filled with pilgrims that Legionaries of Christ Fr. Matthew Schneider asked for prayers for those left behind on Sunday morning.

"Pray for a few people who just missed the bus for the Pope's Angelus in Castel Gandolfo," he said in a July 12 X post. "We are squished on the bus, & they sent an extra bus, but some were still left at the bus stand outside the metro," he said, eventually arriving at Castel Gandolfo and sharing a smiling selfie on his account.

After the Angelus reflection and greeting both foreigners and inhabitants of the town, Leo said, "Unfortunately, the winds of war are blowing in the Middle East, in Ukraine and in many other parts of the world, sowing violence, terror and death, and once again affecting many innocent people.

"Let us not allow these events to extinguish the flame of hope and peace, even when it seems fragile and wavering," Leo said, adding, "I renew my hope that we will persevere on the path of dialogue, encounter and diplomacy. This is the only path capable of leading to a just and lasting peace, in which peoples can live in reconciliation, mutual security and respect for the dignity of every person."

After praying for "seafarers, fishermen and dockworkers" and their families on what is commemorated as Sea Sunday, Leo greeted Polish pilgrims from the Jasna Gora shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa — with Poles flooding the little town they know well from when St. John Paul II spent his summer vacation there.

"The Holy Father is a caring, open and listening pastor, really focused on the people, and not putting distance, whether you're a layperson or priest," Polish Fr. Michal Miszkurka said of the American pope. "And here in Castel Gandolfo you can really see that lack of distance in a literal way!" he added.