News



Pilgrims attend an outdoor Mass outside the Church of San Cayetano during the annual pilgrimage honoring St. Cajetan, the patron saint of work, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Aug. 7, 2026. (AP/Natacha Pisarenko)

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Nearly 40 years after the last papal visit to Argentina, many Catholics received the news of Pope Leo XIV's trip to the South American country in November as a divine sign during economic hardships that have driven millions of Argentines into debt.

The announcement of Leo's first South American tour comes at a time when the Argentine Catholic Church has been warning of an alarming deterioration in the living conditions of the most marginalized sectors as a consequence of libertarian President Javier Milei's austerity plan. Since taking office in December 2023, Milei has managed to slow inflation and reduce the fiscal deficit, but at a high social cost.

The decline in wages and pensions, coupled with an increase in the cost of public transportation, utilities, rent and food, has forced millions of Argentines to go into debt to survive.

"I hope the pope comes to help the poor like me," said María Ruíz Díaz, a 70-year-old retiree who, as she does every Aug. 7, went to the Parish of St. Cajetan in Buenos Aires to pray to the Catholic saint of work.

"The country is going through a difficult time; there are many brothers and sisters in need," said Santiago Olave, 60, among dozens of devotees waiting to enter the sanctuary. "The pope can open hearts and minds."

Milei has defended his plan, saying this week: "I am not going to engage in populism. I am going to die with my boots on, doing what is right and doing what is proper. If you want populism, you have other alternatives."

A timely visit for Argentina's Catholic community

Coinciding with the announcement of the pope's visit, the parish placed a cardboard cutout next to the image of the saint, depicting the pope alongside an elderly woman, a woman with a disability in a wheelchair, a homeless man, and a teacher, beneath the inscription "Saint Cajetan, here are your people."

They represent some of the sectors most affected by the Milei administration's budget cuts to health, education and vulnerable populations.



A banner with an image of Pope Leo XIV is posted outside the Church of San Cayetano during the annual pilgrimage honoring St. Cajetan, the patron saint of work, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Aug. 7, 2026. (AP/Natacha Pisarenko)

"St. Cajetan, here are your people, who refuse to accept that work is a commodity and that one must have two or more jobs to make ends meet, or fall into the trap of loans that indebt and suffocate so many families," said the Buenos Aires Archbishop Jorge García Cuerva, as he led Mass on Aug. 7.

"With Pope Leo XIV, we say that economic freedom cannot be absolute and must always be measured in terms of the common good and the dignity of each person," the archbishop added.

During his stay, Leo will visit the shrine of Our Lady of Lujan, the patron saint of Argentina, in that suburb west of the capital, and the province of Cordoba, the Vatican confirmed.

Leo will visit Argentina, Uruguay and Peru from Nov. 8-11. The schedule of activities has not yet been announced.

The last leader of the Catholic Church to visit Argentina was John Paul II in April 1987. Francis never returned to his native country after assuming the papacy in 2013.

The visit is especially significant because of Leo's longstanding ties to Peru. The first U.S.-born pope spent decades there as a missionary and church leader and served as bishop of Chiclayo from 2015-2023. He also holds Peruvian citizenship.

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