



The uncovered facade of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary is seen with mosaics by Fr. Marko Rupnik at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in southwestern France in April 2023. (OSV News photo/courtesy Greg Erlandson)



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One of the world's most iconic Catholic shrines has become a lightning rod for church controversy ahead of Pope Leo XIV's visit there in September.

Two recent decisions by Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes-Lourdes, France, have positioned the Marian shrine at Lourdes as a microcosm for church issues that have made headlines in recent months, placing them in the spotlight ahead of the pope's visit there at the end of September.

Micas decreed that members of the formerly Catholic ultraconservative Society of St. Pius X are banned from celebrating Mass at the Marian shrine in the wake of the most significant schism in the recent history of the Catholic Church.

"I cannot authorize the celebration of Mass nor that of other sacraments, nor even public prayers by the Fraternity of St. Pius X inside of the sanctuary," the bishop wrote in a letter dated Aug. 13 and later [circulated](#) on a French blog site. Micas' letter did leave the door open for Society of St. Pius X adherents to pray in private at the shrine.



Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes-Lourdes, France (OSV News/Courtesy of Lourdes Sanctuary)

"I am well aware of the pain and perhaps the incomprehension that this decision will cause," Micas continued. "We are deeply pained before the tearing of the tunic of Christ caused by our divisions. They scandalized the little ones and hinder our witness to the Gospel."

The July [schism](#), triggered by the illicit consecration of four new bishops for the society without papal approval, drew swift [condemnation](#) by the Vatican and drew a declaration stating that all society bishops, priests and laypeople who adhere to the schism had been excommunicated.

At least one Society of St. Pius X group in the United Kingdom was [scheduled](#) to organize a pilgrimage to Lourdes in October, which included celebrating two Masses and a eucharistic procession at the shrine.

Micas also stated in an [interview](#) that the mosaics adorning the shrine at Lourdes designed by Fr. Marko Rupnik will be entirely concealed ahead of and following the pope's visit.

The disgraced artist, [accused of sexually and spiritually abusing more than two dozen women](#), was expelled from the Jesuit order in 2023 for disobedience and is the subject of an ongoing [canonical trial](#) in the Vatican.

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As one of the most prominent artists working in the church, whose distinctive artwork appears in the Vatican and in major sites of Catholic worship around the world, Rupnik triggered a churchwide reckoning over how to handle his art installations.

Following a 2023 consultation process that included victims of abuse, Micas [stated](#) that "it would be preferable to remove these mosaics" from the Lourdes shrine.

Part of the mosaics on the facade of the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary at the shrine [were covered](#) in March 2025, but Micas [told](#) La Dépêche du Midi this month that all of the mosaics will be covered ahead of the pope's visit and will remain so afterward.

The pope is expected to [meet with victims](#) of clergy sex abuse during his Sept. 25-28 visit to France, the first apostolic voyage of a pope since 2008 to the country considered "the eldest daughter of the church."

Leo has previously [met victims](#) of abuse at the Vatican and he [sat down with](#) six Spanish abuse victims for almost an hour in Madrid during his [trip to Spain](#).

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This story appears in the **Pope Leo in France** feature series. [View the full series](#).