



Pope Leo XIV, flanked by Captains Regent Alice Mina, left, and Vladimiro Selva, waves to faithful from the balcony of Palazzo Pubblico (City Hall) during his visit to San Marino Aug. 22, 2026. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

Giada Zampano

[View Author Profile](#)

NICCOLÒ LUPONE

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

San Marino — August 22, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Pope Leo XIV on Aug. 22 hailed the tiny Republic of San Marino as a model of political freedom and civic responsibility, praising its centuries-old republican traditions while warning against political and economic systems that place power above the human person.

Addressing local authorities during a one-day visit to the world's oldest surviving republic, Leo reflected on the legacy of Sts. Marino and Leone, whom he credited with helping create a society rooted in freedom, mutual respect and community.

The pope said the two saints translated the Christian message into "a new community and political model, strongly characterized by the Christian principles of freedom, mutual respect and communion," a legacy that he said continues to shape the republic today.

San Marino, a nation of about 35,000 people completely surrounded by the Italian state, traces its origins to the fourth century. It is governed by a 60-member parliament that elects two captains regent every six months to serve jointly as heads of state, a power-sharing arrangement designed to prevent the concentration of authority.

Using the micro state as an example, Leo argued that small political communities can offer lessons in public service and social cohesion at a time of growing division and distrust.

Leo is the third pope to visit San Marino, after St. John Paul II visited in 1982 and Pope Benedict XVI came in 2011.



Faithful wait for Pope Leo XIV outside the Basilica during his visit to San Marino Aug. 22, 2026. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

The American pontiff praised a society "built on respect for one's own freedom and that of others and above all on respect for the sacred Will of God."

He warned that modern societies face increasing threats from violence, social fragmentation and ideologies that put self-interest ahead of the common good.

"We live in a world wounded by many conflicts," the pope said, citing growing violence, closures and fear of others. He urged Christians to respond through forgiveness, solidarity and concern for the vulnerable.

Leo also described San Marino as a "laboratory of good politics" and called for public life to uphold the dignity of every human person "from conception to natural death" — language commonly used by Vatican officials and Catholic leaders when referring to church opposition to abortion and euthanasia.

In 2021, San Marino voters approved a referendum legalizing abortion during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, overturning a decades-old ban. The referendum represented a significant change in law and public policy in a country with deep Catholic roots.

While Leo did not directly address the referendum, he repeatedly stressed the need for political, social and economic systems to place human dignity at their center. He warned against models that present themselves as liberating but ultimately fail to serve the human person and the common good.

The pope also praised small communities in the San Marino-Montefeltro region that have responded to depopulation and the loss of services through mutual support and cooperation.

Advertisement