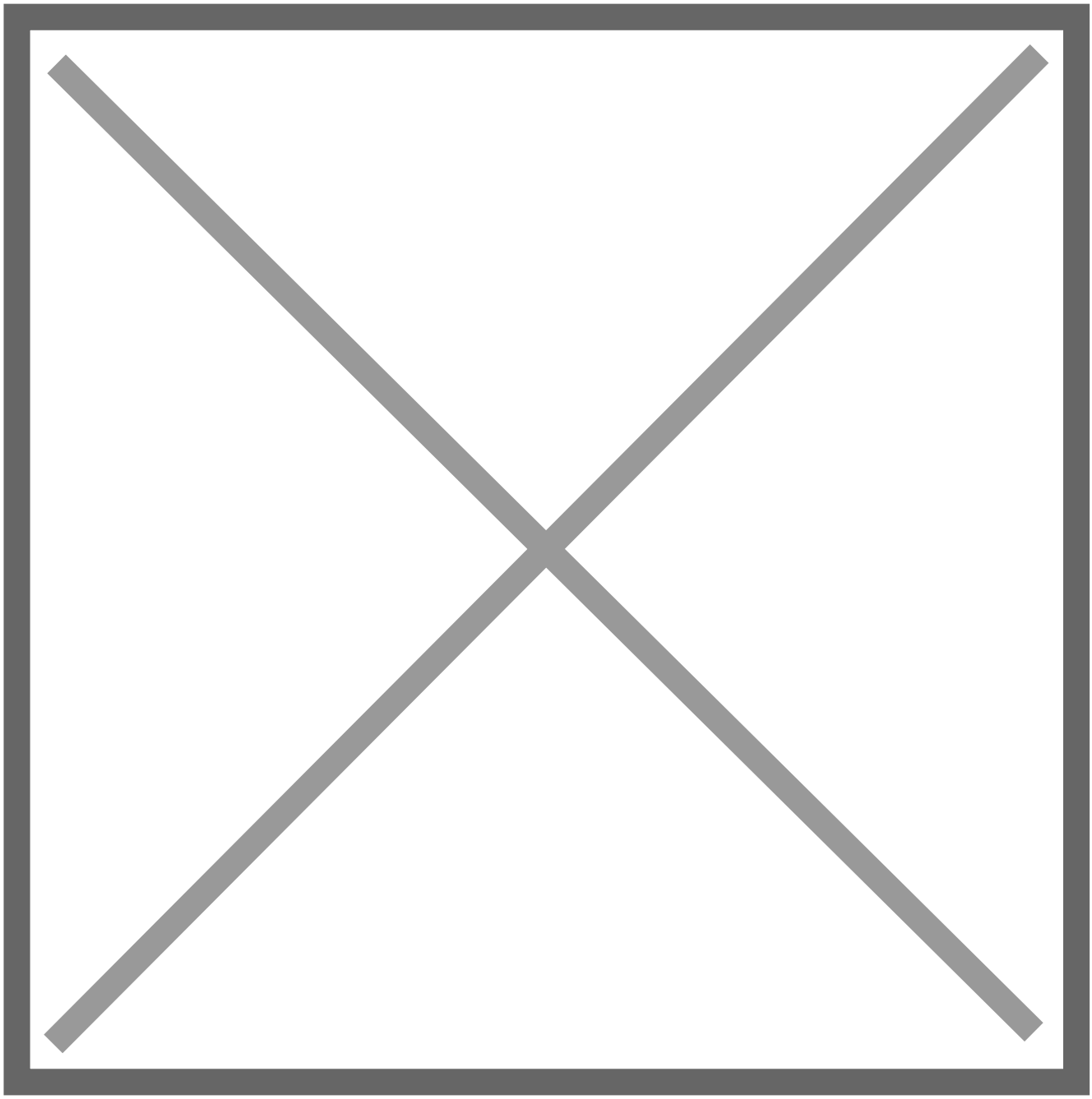
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Pope Leo XIV delivers a speech with a statue of St. Gennaro in the background, during a meeting with members of the clergy on the day of the first anniversary of his election, at Naples Cathedral in Italy May 8, 2026. With the pope to visit Peru in November, Catholic observers say he has emerged as the world's most prominent Peruvian since his May 2025 election. Leo's first South American journey will also include Uruguay and Argentina. (OSV News/Reuters/Yara Nardi)



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Buenos Aires — September 9, 2026

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The Peruvian city of Callao announced an unusual tribute to Pope Leo XIV ahead of his November visit to the South American country: the largest statue of the pontiff in the world.

The 45.9-foot-tall statue of Leo will grace a seafront park overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Callao, located in the northern suburbs of Lima, the national capital.

"This work will be a source of pride for all the residents of Callao and a new space for us to come together as a community," said Mayor César Pérez, according to the newspaper El Comercio. "May the (statue) be a place that transmits faith, hope, and unity, and may this sculpture become a symbol that accompanies families."

The mayor added that the local government donated park space, while a private firm provided funding for the statue.

The steel and marble statue of the pope with open arms is expected to be installed prior to his arrival in Peru Nov. 11. Pérez expressed hope that the statue would be inaugurated during the pope's five-day trip to Peru. The visit — a homecoming for Leo, who became a Peruvian citizen while serving as bishop of Chiclayo — will cap an 11-day journey to South America, which includes visits to Uruguay and Argentina.

Leo is expected to arrive in Callao, site of Lima's international airport, but not spend time in the city, despite serving as apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Callao for 13 months, ending in May 2021.

Pérez remembered Leo driving some 475 miles from Chiclayo to Callao during the COVID-19 pandemic, where, the mayor told EFE, "he oversaw food donations, helping those who have the least and need the most. That was Robert Prevost's way of working when he was administrator of the Callao Diocese."

The statue being built in Callao reflects the stature and popularity of Leo in his adopted home country, where Catholic observers say he has emerged as the world's most prominent Peruvian since his May 2025 election. Observers say excitement for the papal trip is especially strong in northern Peru, where Leo served as an Augustinian missionary and later bishop of Chiclayo from 2015 to 2023.

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"What's being promoted," by Peruvian church leaders "is how important it is to have a Peruvian pope and how good it is that he's returning," Jesuit Fr. José Luis Gordillo, told OSV News.

Church leaders have promoted Leo's teachings ahead of the visit, with "the result being an emphasis on Leo's role as someone who will be a relevant leader, a leader relevant to the world, and who will say something relevant to the country," Gordillo said. "I do believe that the archdiocese (of Lima) and probably the episcopal conference are also expecting that."

Leo is expected to visit Lima, Chiclayo, Pucallpa and Cusco between Nov. 11 and Nov. 17. Observers say the trip incorporates the three regions of Peru: the coast, mountains and jungle — each representing different cultures and socioeconomic realities.

The official agenda of the pope's trip to Peru is to be published shortly after Vatican confirmation is received around Sept. 15, Bishop Carlos García Camader of Lurín, president of the Peruvian bishops' conference, told Agencia Andina.

Pope Francis visited Peru in 2018. The late pope never visited his native Argentina after being elected in 2013. He never voiced his reasons for not visiting his homeland, but church observers cite deep political divisions in Argentina as a possible motive. Church officials hope Leo's visit can encourage unity among Argentines.

"It's a very polarized country," Bishop Dante Braida of La Rioja, Argentina, told OSV News. "There are two opposing political sectors, which are vying for power. … They've had great difficulty finding common ground to build a country together.

"On the other hand, there's a church that tries to accompany a process of dialogue, of openness, and that tries to be close to the grassroots," he continued. "It's a country with a certain degree of complexity, but the pope will always be welcome, and we trust that his presence will be a presence of unity. And of dialogue. That's what's needed."

Leo arrives in Buenos Aires Nov. 8. Archbishop Jorge García Cuerva of Buenos Aires has provided details of the pope's proposed itinerary, which, in the Argentine capital, includes celebrating Mass at the Monumento a los Españoles; an encounter with labor leaders, workers and public and private officials at the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina; and a visit to the Pequeño Cottolengo Don Orione, which serves people with developmental disabilities. Leo is also expected to visit a prison in Buenos Aires.

The pope will spend Nov. 10 in the city of Cordoba, roughly 425 miles northwest of Argentina, where he will celebrate Mass and later meet with priests, religious and seminarians at the local cathedral. He will celebrate Mass the next day at the Basilica of Our Lady of Luján near Buenos Aires — a shrine to the namesake patroness of Argentina — before flying onward to Peru. No pope has visited Argentina since St. John Paul II in 1987.

Leo's first trip to South America begins Nov. 6 in Uruguay, the least religious country in Latin America. The pope is scheduled to visit the cities of Montevideo, the capital, along with Paysandú on the border with Argentina and Florida. His visit to Florida on Nov. 8 coincides with celebrations of Our Lady of the 33, the national patroness.

Official details of the pope's itinerary in Uruguay are expected to be released sometime after Sept. 21, said Gabriela Gómez, press director for the Archdiocese of Montevideo.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in Uruguay, Argentina and Peru** feature series. View the full series.