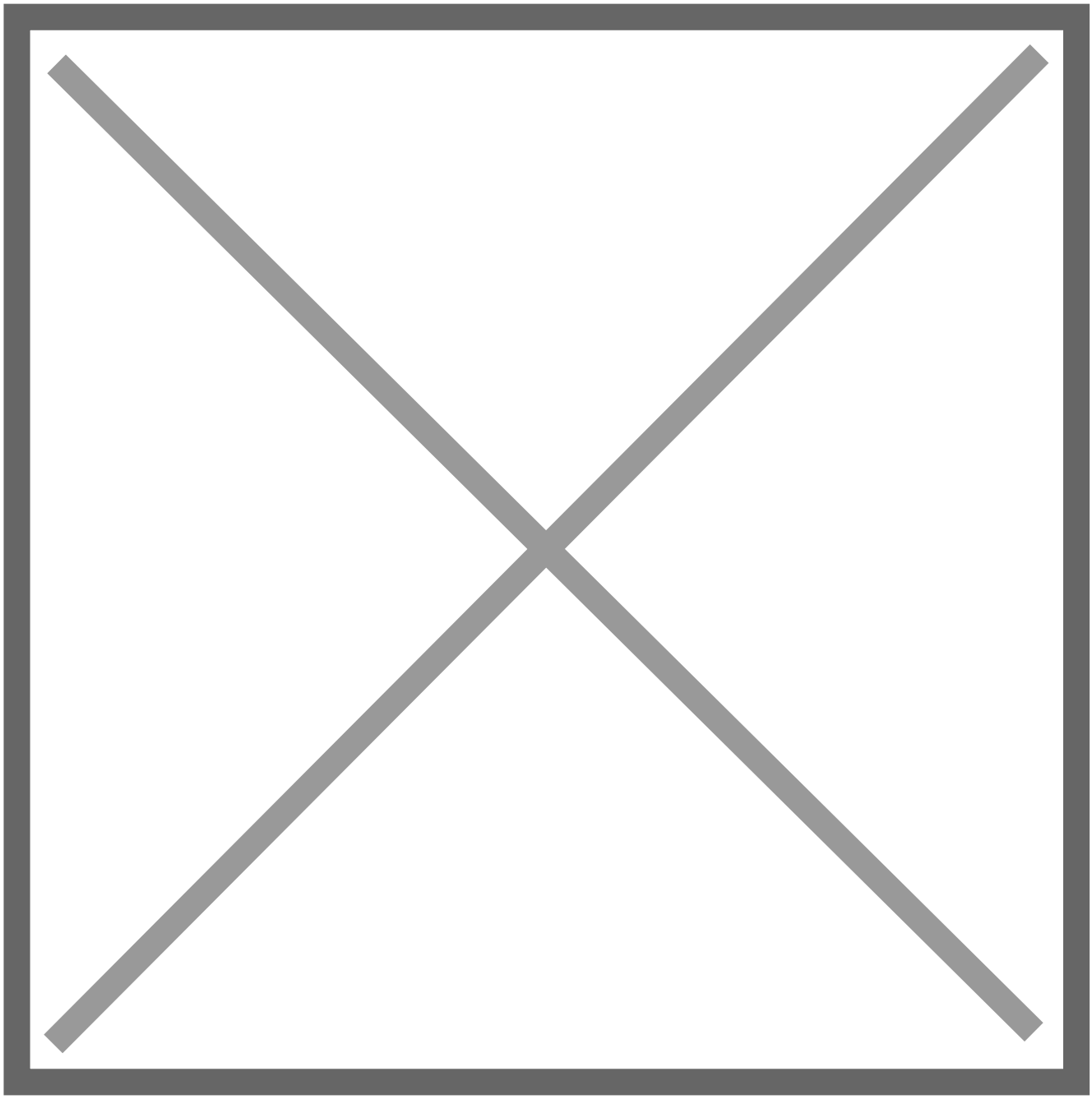
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Mildred Camacho presents a portrait to her godfather, Pope Leo XIV, during his weekly general audience July 1, 2026. Camacho, who is named after the pope's late mother, said she is grateful that her godfather is visiting Peru during his Nov. 6-17 apostolic journey to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru. (OSV News/Courtesy of Mildred Camacho)

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Though she bears the name of Pope Leo XIV's late mother, Mildred Camacho says she prefers to be among the crowds rather than in the front row to welcome her godfather back to Peru.

"Beyond formal receptions and official greetings — which of course I would have loved — deep down, I really wanted to experience the crowd, the lively commotion, with everyone cheering and celebrating. I believe things happen this way for a reason and with a greater purpose," Camacho said in a Nov. 10 phone interview with OSV News.

While she signed up as a volunteer for the papal events in Chiclayo, she said that "if for any reason an invitation comes through," she would be overjoyed to greet him face to face.

"But I am equally delighted to be participating as a volunteer," Camacho added. "I would love to be in both places — to have a quiet moment to spend with him, but I certainly can't complain; I am thrilled to be a volunteer and soak in all that joy. I trust deeply that God's timing is perfect. I consider myself very fortunate and blessed because our paths always cross again."

A 'blessing' to be named after the pope's mother

Camacho's father, Hector, first met then-Fr. Robert Prevost in Chulucanas, where the young Augustinian served as a missionary.

According to the Vatican News documentary on the pope's early days in the country, "León de Perú," the man recalled the young priest telling him that he was traveling to the United States because his mother, Mildred, had died.

Moved by Prevost's grief, Hector told him his wife was pregnant and asked if he could name his daughter after the missionary's late mother and asked him to serve as the child's godfather, which the future pope accepted.

Camacho told OSV News that as a child, she was always curious about her name, which was uncommon in Peru.

"Here in Peru, common names are usually María, Juanita, Fernanda," she explained. "Mine is one of the few you hear, at least here in my town; I don't know anyone else with my name."

Although she knew she was named after her godfather's mother, Camacho said she didn't know much about Mildred Prevost and "only knew my godfather was a priest, a friend of my father, and … that I carried his mother's name."

Nevertheless, she always felt that having her name was a "beautiful gesture of appreciation and love" that brings "a very deep, beautiful emotional resonance."

"The fact that my godfather and my father agreed to let me be named after Mrs. Mildred is an immense honor. I feel very honored. It is a stroke of fortune, a great blessing," Camacho told OSV News.

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Few occasions to see her godfather now

Although she was able to meet with Pope Leo during his weekly general audience July 1, Camacho said that given his responsibilities as supreme pontiff, she can't keep in touch as before.

The pope's goddaughter noted that although she was able to greet him personally, she "still attended the Angelus on the next two Sundays and a general audience just to be among the crowd, chanting and shouting: 'Bravo! Long live Leo!'"

Nevertheless, she noted, "there is indirect contact through a few journalists who work closely with him and pass along an occasional greeting, but I don't want to push too hard either because he is very busy."

"If an opportunity ever arises where we need to speak because I genuinely need his guidance, I know he will answer me," Camacho added. "Right now, his inner circle is much more protected; that is his role; he is a head of state. He is not only our spiritual guide to follow, he is also a head of state, and to me it is completely understandable that his environment has become much more secluded."

One of the downsides of minimal communication was evident when the pope made the surprise announcement during his Sunday Angelus address Oct. 11 that he would undergo surgery to remove a lung nodule.

Given the time difference, Camacho told OSV News that upon waking up, she received numerous messages from journalists in Italy asking for her reaction.

"Naturally, the very first word that crossed my mind was cancer," she recalled, adding that she was overcome with emotion after having seen her mother go through chemotherapy, which is "not something anyone should go through alone."

Goddaughter hopes 'the desires of his heart are fulfilled' in Peru

It was hard for her "To think of my godfather, being an older gentleman, surrounded by friends but without his immediate family right by his side," Camacho said. "The press immediately asked for a statement, but I asked them to respect that this was an extremely sensitive subject for me, not just because of him, but because of my mother."

However, Camacho told OSV News she was moved by messages from people on social media to tell her they were organizing prayer groups to pray for Leo "just to lift my spirits."

"Faith is genuinely something incredible and miraculous," she said. "I felt God clearly showing His hand when, just a few days after the operation, we saw my godfather already back on his feet and completely out of danger. Only then was I finally able to breathe easy."

She, however, found some coverage about the pope's health distressing, particularly when speculating about "genetics" and the longevity of his papacy following his cancer diagnosis.

"People really need to be more careful and cautious with what they say," Camacho told OSV News. "I would hear those news reports and think, 'They are writing him off without even waiting, without keeping faith in God that everything will turn out fine.' There is a greater purpose behind all of this."

Grateful that her godfather recovered well enough to make it to Peru, Camacho said that if given the chance to speak with him, she would "greet him and ask once more for his blessing upon him, upon my family, and upon Peru."

"Just as I have expressed in every personal message sent to him through mutual contacts, I hope that all the desires of his heart are fulfilled, because I know he dreams of a community that is more united, more charitable, and kinder to one another," she said.

"Above all, I want to ask for his blessing and tell him not to let this be his final visit to Peru; I have a strong feeling that this will neither be his first nor his last visit to our homeland."

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