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Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV receives a hug as he greets people during a meeting on the challenges and hopes for the country's future at Plaza de Armas in Lima, Peru, Nov. 12, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Lima, Peru — November 12, 2026
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On his first full day in his adopted home of Peru, Pope Leo XIV said the Catholic Church must confront abuse perpetrated by its members, and, in his first address to the Peruvian public, he decried the mistreatment of women in the church and society.

The day followed an astonishing homecoming, when some 3 million people lined the streets to welcome the pope — the largest crowd he has seen as pope. His second day in the country, Nov. 12, carried the celebration forward while delivering pointed messages to the Peruvian church and society.

Pope condemns church polarization and abuse

Leo began the day by meeting with Peru's bishops, a famously divided episcopate that splits liberation theology-minded progressives concerned with social issues and Opus Dei-influenced conservatives more focused on doctrinal orthodoxy and morality questions.

Leo knows those divisions well. He was a member of the Peruvian bishops' conference while leading the Chiclayo Diocese in northern Peru from 2014 to 2023, and was elected second vice president of the conference in 2018.

Addressing the bishops at the Lima archbishop's residence, Leo recalled being among them during Pope Francis' 2018 visit to Peru. He repeated the late pope's message to the bishops then: "Do not remain prisoners of divisions that create cliques and hamper our vocation to be a sacrament of communion."

"Communion among you, among us, is the foundation of the credibility of the Gospel you proclaim," Leo said.



Pope Leo XIV greets people from the popemobile on his way to the archbishop's residence for a meeting with the country's bishops in Lima, Peru, Nov. 12, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

As bishop of Chiclayo and later as a cardinal in the Roman Curia, the future pope was instrumental in Francis' decision to suppress the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, a Catholic society founded in Peru that developed a presence in the United States and was found to have perpetrated widespread spiritual, physical and sexual abuse.

Now addressing the bishops he once served alongside, Leo acknowledged the "abuses perpetrated by members of the clergy or within the context of the church."

"We must respond as Jesus would, with truth, justice, forgiveness, making amends and an ever more resolute commitment to fostering a culture of prevention and protection for the weakest in light of such crimes," he said.

Leo delivered those remarks at the residence that had been the home of Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani for 20 years. The former archbishop of Lima, and the first cardinal

from the Catholic society Opus Dei, was accused of perpetrating abuses dating to the early 1980s. In 2019, Francis placed sanctions on Cipriani's priestly functions and restricted his activity and residence.

In Lima, the pope met with six victims of abuse, among them ex-members of the Sodalitium society. In an hourlong meeting, they discussed how to develop a “change of mentality toward the listening of victims” on behalf of the church, the Vatican said in a statement.

Leo decries machismo

The day's agenda also included an event that caught attention when it appeared on the itinerary for the pope's trip since it was not a typical religious ceremony nor an explicitly political meeting: an address to the Peruvian public on "the challenges and hopes for the future of the Peruvian people."

After addressing Lima's Catholic community at the cathedral, Leo walked into the city's central square, where some 40,000 people had gathered to see their Peruvian pope.

In his address, the pope touched on issues ranging from education to the sanctity of the family. He asserted that "God created the human person male and female," but said that such a distinction "does not justify an unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities or the subordination of one spouse to the other," a phrase that solicited strong cheers from women in the square.

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Leo spent a significant portion of his speech calling on society and the church to "effectively promote the presence, respect and participation of women."

"It is sad to see that machismo persists, manifested in the absence of fathers from family life, in abuse and violence against women," he said. "This mentality disregards the newness of Christianity, which recognizes and proclaims that men and women possess equal dignity and responsibility."

Though the jubilant crowd fell sober during the pope's serious remarks, they listened attentively as he noted the "double marginalization" that women in poverty, women

of African descent, and Indigenous women endure.

"I would like to renew an ardent appeal, not only to my brothers and sisters in the faith but to every man and woman of goodwill: Let us value women!" he said, again waking the audience to cheers. "Let us protect and respect girls!"

A moment of levity

Despite his serious messages, the pope also had light moments with the crowd. He got his biggest rise when quoting a Peruvian waltz that describes the country's landscape. He paused as the crowd joined in to complete the line, then finished with the song's final verse: "This is my Peru!"

Rarely had Leo so firmly seized an audience.

Though he had filled Lima's central square and was set to preside over a youth vigil at Peru's largest sporting stadium that evening, Leo's first major event on Peruvian soil outside the capital will come in his former diocese of Chiclayo, where he will travel Friday, Nov. 13.

But already Leo is showing signs of levity as he spends more time on home turf.

The previous evening, crowds had gathered, singing and chanting, outside the Vatican ambassador's residence in Lima, where Leo is staying. When the pope appeared at the window to bless them, he asked them to keep the noise down so the neighbors could sleep.

"The party can still go on for a while, but not all night," he said with a smile.

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