Vatican

Vatican News



Densy Jaime Ramos, front center, stands with her family while awaiting papal Mass Nov. 13, 2026, at Pampas de Pimentel outside of Chiclayo, Peru, during Pope Leo XIV's Nov. 6-17 apostolic journey to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru. (NCR photo/Justin McLellan)



by Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Chiclayo, Peru — November 13, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Among the first words Pope Leo XIV uttered after being elected as the successor of Peter May 8, 2025, was a greeting to his "beloved Diocese of Chiclayo, in Peru, where a faithful people has accompanied its bishop."

Now, among the million people who lined the 9-mile route to see their bishop emeritus as he traveled to celebrate his Mass in his former diocese, a sign held overhead and waving among the crowd read: "Your faithful people welcome you."

In the coastal desert region of Peru's north, trees are sparse and the wind whipping off the nearby Pacific Ocean kicks up a faint dust that coats the bare-brick homes that line the streets.

Yet it was here that gave rise to a pope, an American-born missionary who served for 20 years in Peru, a country he called his "homeland" shortly after arriving in its capital city two days prior.

Though the massive crowds in Lima frequently met the pope cheering that "the pope is Peruvian," those chants evolved as the pope made his way through the city he once called home in the country's north: "The pope is Chiclayano!" yelled well-wishers as Leo passed them by.



Pope Leo XIV waves as he arrives to celebrate an outdoor Mass at Pampas de Pimentel near Chiclayo, Peru, Nov. 13, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

Leo relishes in his return

For eight years, Robert Prevost was known in this town as "Monseñor Roberto," but returning here for the first time dressed in papal white, Leo appeared to delight in his homecoming.

"What a joy it is to return to Chiclayo!" Leo said in the first line of his homily at the large, open dirt plain prepared with a massive stage, speakers and screens for the Mass, igniting cheers from the half-a-million-large crowd.

Related: As Pope Francis' pick for Peru, Bishop Prevost reshaped an 'Opus Dei diocese'

"It is a blessing for me to be with you once again," he told the crowd, which had traveled all across the region for the Mass. "Thank you for your affection, the support and your prayers, especially for my health during this time of trial which, with God's help, I am overcoming."

Leo underwent an operation one month ago today to remove a cancerous tumor from his right lung. The prospect of his 12-day, three-country tour of Latin America was plunged into uncertainty as a result of the surprise cancer diagnosis, but the pope has been indefatigable through the 24 speeches and eight flights he has completed so far, showing no difficulty in keeping up with his ambitious agenda and remaining engaged through his many events.

And in Chiclayo, the energy was contagious.

At several points along the pope's route to Mass, people held out loudspeakers blaring the "Cumbia del Papa," a song written after Leo's election in the upbeat dancing rhythm typical of the Andean region. The song has become an anthem in Chiclayo: "We give thanks to God, because the pope is Peruvian, he's from Chiclayo, he is Pope Leo."

Advertisement

Gas stations and grocery stores hung banners with images of the pope saying, "Welcome home, Pope Leo XIV," and a local ice cream company placed ads throughout the city marketing a specially made "paleta" popsicle in the form of the Leo which it had dubbed the "papaleta."

That fervor was just along the route the pope traveled to reach the wide open space where he celebrated Mass. The people gathered to see the pope awaited him waving banners and holding high photos of themselves with their former bishop. Many had small paper flags with a drawing of the pope riding a mule — a reference to an image of the future pope visiting a parish that went viral after his election.

Upon emerging among the crowd in the popemobile, he was met by a rhythmic rhyming chant repeated by some 500,000 people: "Leo, my friend, Chiclayo is with you!"



A flag depicts Chiclayo Bishop Robert Prevost, the future Pope Leo XIV, riding a mule. (NCR photo/Justin McLellan)

'He is back here in his land'

Despite the day's punishing heat, the crowds gathered in the bare dirt esplanade — many of them had camped there overnight — were starstruck upon seeing the pope pass by them on the popemobile before celebrating Mass.

Densy Jaime Ramos, a 43-year-old Chiclayo native, was in the front row for the pope's Mass with her three sons, two of whom had served as altar servers for the future pope when he was their bishop.

When Leo rode by the family on the popemobile, the teenage boys had broken into tears.

"He knows very well everything that we have lived through here in the diocese, so it was very special," Ramos told National Catholic Reporter immediately after seeing

the pope ride by. "He is back here in his land. It is such an immense joy."

Even if "Chiclayo is a place that is practically completely unknown," she said, "now, through him, everyone knows Chiclayo, [and that] its people are very committed to God, to prayer, to faith."



Pope Leo XIV celebrates an outdoor Mass at Pampas de Pimentel near Chiclayo, Peru, Nov. 13, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

Even the murals painted around the city reflect her sentiment. A huge mural of the pope in the city center welcomed him to "Chiclayo, city of faith."

Although the people of Chiclayo knew he could not move back to their city after he emerged in white from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica in May 2025, they never doubted that his return was imminent.

María Fe Sant'Esteban, a foreign language teacher who taught at a school operated by the Chiclayo Diocese, said that Bishop Prevost "used to say that he wanted to live

and die here in Chiclayo."

"When he was called [to Rome] we felt very sad, but we were confident that he was called for greater things there," the 49-year-old Chiclayo native said. "We always say that when family that lives abroad comes [back] to Peru it is like charging [their] batteries. ... That's why he really wanted to come to Chiclayo, to Peru."

Related: Chiclayo: A tale of two tables and one pope
This story appears in the **Pope Leo in Uruguay, Argentina and Peru** feature series. View the full series.