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Pope Leo XIV addresses students and members of the university community at Santo Toribio

Pope Leo XIV addresses students and members of the university community at Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo Catholic University during his return to Chiclayo, where he served as bishop from 2015 to 2023, Nov. 13, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Yara Nardi)

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Returning to his former diocese in northern Peru, Pope Leo XIV called on local clergy to turn talk of church reform into concrete action by shedding clericalism and warned university students about the threats of soulless technology to human dignity.

Speaking at two afternoon gatherings in Chiclayo Nov. 13, where he served as bishop for roughly eight years, the pope focused on addressing pastoral accountability and the pitfalls of artificial intelligence.

"It is easy to speak about synodality, but putting it into practice is a challenge and requires everyone to examine their attitudes and conduct, beginning with the

pastors, who are the primary servants of the community," Leo told bishops, priests, seminarians and lay leaders gathered at the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace.

The pope, who led the diocese from 2015 to 2023, also emphasized the importance of lay participation in the life of the Church.

"Authority within the Church must be exercised in the forms of service, discernment and appreciation of charisms and initiatives, since the participation of the laity is not a concession but an expression of their baptismal dignity," he said.

Welcoming Leo to the shrine, Bishop Edinson Farfán Córdova of Chiclayo said those present represented a "diversity of faces and of vocations that manifest the beauty of a church alive in communion, participation and mission."

Before his address, the pope heard the testimonies of a priest, a religious sister and a layperson. The diocesan priest recalled Leo's episcopal motto "In Illo Uno Unum" ("In the One, we are one") and thanked him for teaching clergy "to avoid every clericalist attitude, to know how to listen to the laity — our brothers and sisters — to give them their rightful space."

Sr. Rocío Carrasco Quintana, a missionary with the Daughters of St. Mary of Providence in nearby Trujillo, told the pope that the synodal experience among religious congregations was needed in a society "so battered by violence and distrust."

"The most genuine and transformative expression of our charisms is revealed in the faith and commitment of so many lay men and women who bring life to our missions and to various pastoral initiatives. Discerning and making decisions with them is the commitment and challenge that we assume as consecrated life and as a synodal church," she said.

A laywoman from the Archdiocese of Piura told Leo how synodality moved from abstract theory to door-to-door ministry as pastoral workers carried a pilgrim statue of the Virgin Mary into homes for three-day vigils.

"We learned that synodality is not making plans from a desk, but all of us sitting at the same table," she said, adding that the church must be one "with open doors and feet on the road."

Drawing from their testimonies, Leo said authentic communion in the church "is not uniformity," but rather "values the diversity of cultures, vocations, charisms and ministries as a richness, and promotes them."

Citing the Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* ("Joy and Hope"), the pope reminded those present that "a synodal church, moreover, shares the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of humanity, especially of the poor and those who suffer."

"Listening to social and cultural realities; defending human dignity; accompanying families, young people, migrants, indigenous peoples and those living in poverty; and working for justice, peace and the common good are not optional tasks, they are requirements of our ecclesial mission," he said.

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After his meeting, the pope traveled to the Santo Toribio de Mogrovejo Catholic University, where he met with faculty, civil authorities and students from across northern Peru, who received him with warmth, joy and constant cheers.

Patricia Campos Olazábal, the university's rector, welcomed the pope, recalling his time as the university's grand chancellor and bishop of Chiclayo and describing him "as a pastor who walked, worked, struggled and laughed with us."

"You always had the right words for everyone. … For our city -- and especially for the university community — it is a day of joy, an unforgettable occasion," she added. Citing the pope's apostolic letter commemorating the 60th anniversary of the conciliar declaration *Gravissimum Educationis*, Campos stressed that there are things algorithms cannot replace.

She told Leo that university students from the whole region had come to listen to his message of hope "for it to shed light on their present and future, immersed and captivated by artificial intelligence, for them to know how to discern what is true and what's false. So, they don't change the human, what makes us truly human, for an algorithm that would never replace our essence."

In his address, the pope warned against reducing higher education to mere job training for a competitive market and said that "a progress that is indifferent to

justice and the dignity of workers becomes, in fact, a mechanism of oppression and exclusion."

"The Catholic university therefore has a duty to remind the public and political spheres that science without a conscience ruins everyone's life. In the same way, technology without a soul does not truly improve life," he said.

Echoing his past warnings on the overreliance on technology, which he said was "not always neutral," Leo warned university members against submitting to a "technocratic paradigm which reduces reality to material data, considering efficiency to be the supreme value."

Invoking the memory of St. Turibius, or Santo Toribio as he is known, and his efforts to learn the language and culture of the Indigenous people he cared for, the pope said his pastoral work "continues to inspire us."

"Indeed, today the deserts are not only the arid expanses of Lambayeque, which that holy shepherd crossed on horseback, but they are the new forms of moral and civic illiteracy that exclude the poor," he said. "A university modeled on his example is called to use scientific innovation to bridge social divides and heal society's wounds."

Addressing university students as "'natives' of this new era," Pope Leo encouraged them to cultivate a "living relationship with God."

"Both prayer and study transform our minds to the point of changing our lives," he said. "Accepting the truth, then, becomes a conscious effort, and whether through prayer or study, reflection turns into action. Both become an opportunity to seek and discover joy at every stage of life."

He also encouraged professors and academic leaders to see their work "as a lofty expression of intellectual charity."

"As you accompany these young people in their classes and research, offer each one a consistent witness through your lives," he said. "Be free thinkers, for whom truth takes precedence over opinion, and justice over self-interest."

"As you cultivate your scientific expertise, translate it into works of social justice, especially for the benefit of the poorest, and in the care of creation, which today is so wounded by profiteering that disregards the common good," the pope added.

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