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Analysis



Pope Leo XIV waves as he arrives for a meeting at Saqsaywaman national archaeological park on the outskirts of Cusco, Peru, Nov. 15, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Sebastian Castaneda)



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Of the 12 flights (and two helicopter rides) Pope Leo XIV took to traverse the South American continent, three of them he took on Sunday, Nov. 15, to travel from the Peruvian coast, mountains and Amazonian jungle within a 12-hour span.

If anyone still had concerns about the pope's health, the agenda of his penultimate day in Peru not only put them to rest, but buried them.

He traveled more than 1,400 miles to zigzag the country he long called home and he delivered four speeches — including one at more than 12,000 feet above sea level from the Saqsaywaman Incan archeological site at Cusco. For someone who had part of his lung removed just over a month ago, the pope appeared in remarkably good form.

Leo began his five-day visit to Peru by stating before the country's president that "to love a people is to desire that everyone may live with dignity among them, to take an interest in them, and to be willing to offer something of oneself for their good."



Women become emotional as Pope Leo XIV speaks during a meeting at Saqsaywaman national archaeological park on the outskirts of Cusco, Peru, Nov. 15, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Yara Nardi)

By that metric, the Peruvian American pope showed his deep love for the Peruvian people over the weekend, visiting the country's far-flung communities in the heights of the Andes and the humidity of the Amazon. For Peru, a highly centralized state where some one in three residents lives in the capital city Lima, the fact that the pope visited mountain territories and Amazonian jungle regions before celebrating his large send-off Mass outside Lima on Nov. 16, sent a message.

In Cusco, the former capital of the Incan empire, Leo rolled into the mountaintop archeological site in his popemobile with Incan ruins surrounding him on either side. Before colorfully dressed representatives of popular devotional movements, Leo said, "Popular traditions, with their symbols and dynamics, imbued with values of Christian communion and solidarity, are an invaluable treasure trove of good teachings."

At a time "marked by divisions, wounds, mistrust and situations that make it difficult for men and women to recognize one another as members of the same family," the pope said, the region's religious traditions, characterized by processions, the proliferation of confraternities and saintly devotion "can be of great help, serving as places where people can come together in the light of faith and love."

But it was in Pucallpa in the Peruvian Amazon, a region Pope Francis traveled to in 2018, that Leo delivered one of the most pointed messages of his trip.



Pope Leo XIV watches a traditional dance performed by members of the Shipibo-Konibo Indigenous people during a meeting at Malecón Puerto Callao in Pucallpa, Peru, Nov. 15, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

"In recent years, many Indigenous leaders have been murdered for defending their territories," the pope said in a meeting with representatives of Amazonian communities. "The blood of these brothers cries out to God and demands justice."

Leo also said that the "indiscriminate deforestation and the pollution of rivers and other waters through illegal mining and oil spills" are not "isolated accidents," but rather the "consequences of the irresponsible exploitation of natural resources, which undermines the very existence of communities."

The pope then celebrated Mass with some 100,000 people, the first papal Mass in the Amazon region since St. John Paul II traveled to the Brazilian Amazon in 1980.

Despite reaching out to Peru's peripheries, the crowning Mass of Leo's visit to Peru came Monday, outside of Lima, where addressing a 1.5 million-strong Peruvian public the pope said, "I will always carry you with me."

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"Yes, the Peruvian people are my people too!" he proclaimed in his homily.

Leo's trip laid bare the extent of his identification with Peru, and for the pope who does not shy away from the sentimental — he traveled to Algeria as pope due to his affinity for St. Augustine of Hippo and made a trip to his former diocese among the first of his international trips — a return does not seem entirely out of the question.

Before celebrating his final Mass in Peru, Leo himself suggested that it could not be long before he is reunited with his Peruvian people.

Saying his goodbyes at a home for the elderly outside Lima among his final events in the country, Leo greeted the crowd saying, "Thank you very much, and see you soon."

"Until later," he said.

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