



Thousands of people gather for Mass outside the Cathedral of Santa Maria de Chiclayo in Peru May 10, 2025, celebrating the election of Pope Leo XIV, who was bishop of Chiclayo between 2015 and 2023. He was elected pope at the Vatican May 8, becoming the first American pontiff in history. (OSV News/David Agren)



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CHICLAYO, Peru — May 13, 2025

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Thousands of Catholics packed the plaza outside the Cathedral of Santa Maria de Chiclayo in this northern Peruvian city to celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving for an adoptive son: Pope Leo XIV.

The new pope, who as Bishop Robert Francis Prevost served as bishop in Chiclayo from 2015 to 2023, was fondly remembered by attendees for prioritizing the poor, bringing the church closer to the people and embracing his adopted country.

"We want to thank the risen Lord for having given us this Thursday, May 8, a new successor of Peter, of Christ, Pope Leo, our beloved bishop," said Bishop Edinson Farfán Córdova of Chiclayo, who succeeded Prevost when he was made prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops in January 2023 and elevated to cardinal in September that same year.

"He was among us here. He lived here, learned here. He allowed himself to be evangelized by the simple and faithful people of our lands," Farfán Córdova continued in his homily.

"Monsignor Roberto Prevost was also a man of communion and interiority, who was close to and sensitive to current reality. How can we not thank God for our beloved Diocese of Chiclayo?"

Peruvians have greeted the election of Pope Leo with elation, pride and even disbelief that an adopted prelate whose pastoral formation came as a Augustinian missionary in poor and undeveloped parts of Peru could become pope and represent

the country on the world stage.

The elation was especially strong in Chiclayo, where attendees at the Mass shouted "¡Viva el Papa León!" ("Long live Pope Leo!") and "¡El papa es chiclayano!" ("The pope is a native of Chiclayo!") Many recalled with pride how he acknowledged Chiclayo in his opening remarks after being introduced to the world as Pope Leo XIV.

"I don't know if this can be called a miracle, but it's an extraordinary thing," said Eduardo Lisboa, a mechanic who regularly attended Sunday Mass celebrated by the future Pope Leo. "(It's) like thinking that a priest, a bishop from a town like ours suddenly becomes the pope."

Leo was born in Chicago, but spent nearly 20 years in Peru and became a citizen. People remember his fondness for local dishes such tortitas de choclo — a popular corn cake — along with tireless travels through the diocese, especially in times of crisis such as catastrophic flooding.

"Peru was where he learned to be a priest," Fr. Jorge Majail, spokesman for the Order of St. Augustine in Peru, told OSV News. "It means a lot for Peru to have Pope Leo in Rome and that he encourages us and inspires us and reminds us that we are a land that God loves."

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People have spread memes of the new pope on social media such as the pontiff eating ceviche and drinking Inca Kola, a yellow soda that outsells Coca-Cola in Peru, others proudly show their own photos of the pope on their smartphones, while stories of the pope serving as a godparent at baptisms are rife.

"(There's) joy for someone who not only lived with us, but also lived with us in a unique way, knowing the Peruvian context, the culture, knowing the virtues, knowing the defects, knowing the intricacies, knowing the best and the worst that can exist in a country like ours or in all of Latin America," Jesuit Fr. José Gordillo, a priest in Lima, told OSV News.

"He really identifies with all the roots here, with all of people's idiosyncrasies. He accepts the people's popular religiosity. And he identifies with people's culture and

customs," said Sr. Nilda Ortiz Jiménez, a member of the St. Joseph of Tarbes community. She first met Leo as a young missionary serving in the community of Chulucanas.

"I admire him for his spirit of service, his humility, always being attentive to the needs of the poorest," she added. "When people suffered greatly there in Chiclayo, where he was, he waded into the mud to bring aid to towns that had been isolated by the downpours."

Many people posted photos of Leo working in difficult situations; a picture of him wearing rubber boots, while ministering in a flood zone, made the rounds on social media. That pastoral work has not been forgotten in a country where the official response to the COVID-19 pandemic and catastrophic floods in 2017 were lacking.

"The bishop at the time ... taught us that we can move things forward together," said Delcy Núñez, a Chiclayo resident. "Despite the pandemic, he was able to knock on doors and obtained three oxygen plants."

Leo put special attention on young people. "Almost everyone in Chiclayo" with children, has "a photo with him at their confirmation," said Núñez, whose three sons were confirmed by the future pope.

As pope, Majail expects Leo XIV will draw extensively on his experience as an Augustinian and a bishop in Peru. "He will be a pope who seeks communion, eclesial unity," he said.

"He is a pope who has made his life in Latin America and specifically in Peru. And that will definitely mark his ministry as time will show us. Let's also remember that he is a pope who learned to be poor with the poor and a missionary among the poor."

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. [View the full series.](#)