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Cardinal Stephen leads diocesan delegation to Sichuan, fostering future collaborations and exchanges

In early June, Cardinal Stephen Chow, S.J., led an 11-member delegation from the Diocese of Hong Kong on a visit to various dioceses in Sichuan. During their visit, they met with five bishops to learn more about the local Church and to lay the groundwork for future collaboration and exchanges. The delegation was encouraged by the vibrant energy of young seminarians, priests, and religious sisters, viewing it as a hopeful sign for the future of the Church.

During the five-day trip commencing on June 1, the delegation visited the dioceses of Chengdu, Yibin, and Leshan, in addition to the Sichuan Catholic Seminary and various other locations associated with the Sinicisation of religion.

Upon their arrival in Chengdu on the first day, the delegation visited the local cathedral and participated in a sharing session with five bishops and lay leaders. The bishops present included Bishop Joseph Yuange Tang of Chengdu, Bishop Peter Xuegang Lou of Yibin, Bishop Paul Shiyin Lei of Leshan, Bishop Joseph Gong'ao Chen of Nanchong, and Bishop John Jiapei Lei of Xichang.

The delegation travelled to Yibin the next day and attended the morning Mass at Yibin Cathedral on June 3. Bishop Luo led the service, with Cardinal Stephen, Bishop Joseph Ha, OFM, and priests from Hong Kong concelebrating. Other delegation members and local parishioners also participated in the liturgy. After some local visits, they proceeded to the Diocese of Leshan, where they met with local clergy, religious sisters, and faithful at a reception dinner at the Bishop's House.

On June 4, the delegation visited the Sichuan Catholic Seminary, where they were received by Bishop Joseph Gong'ao Chen, the rector. More than 10 seminar-



Above: The Hong Kong delegation with five bishops in Sichuan at the cathedral compound in Chengdu, on June 1. Front row from the right: Bishop Joseph Gong'ao Chen, Bishop Joseph Yuange Tang, Bishop Joseph Ha, Cardinal Stephen, Bishop Peter Xuegang Lou, Bishop Paul Shiyin and Bishop John Jiapei Lei.

Right: Cardinal Stephen blesses the faithful outside the Yibin Cathedral after the Mass on June 3.



ians met with the group and were delighted to receive the blessing from Cardinal Stephen.

As their five-day visit drew to a close, members of the Hong Kong delegation reflected on their experience. Cardinal Stephen noted that the local spicy cuisine had been thoughtfully adjusted to suit their tastes, allowing them to feel the warm hospitality of the Sichuan people. He added that "the dioceses they visited were highly welcoming, and expressed hope that the trip would mark the beginning of deeper exchanges,

cooperation, and a shared journey of synodality."

Cardinal Stephen expressed that what struck him most was his conversation with Bishop Joseph Gong'ao Chen at the Sichuan Seminary, along with the seminarians' sharing, photo moments, and their welcoming songs. "Young people are truly the hope of both the Church and the nation; we must cherish and nurture them," said Cardinal Stephen. "This trip also offered valuable opportunities to better understand the Sinicisation of religion and the historical con-

text of the Church's Three-Self Movement. He noted that having a reflective understanding is more helpful than uninformed opposition, as these experiences lay a strong groundwork for ongoing dialogue. Such a foundation is crucial for fostering unity amid diversity.

Bishop Ha said that this trip provided him with invaluable firsthand experience of the current situation in the five dioceses of Sichuan and the implementation of national religious policy. "The friendships established with the five bishops will benefit future

exchanges between the dioceses of the two regions and allow the Hong Kong diocese to live out its bridging role." He noted that he was particularly moved by "meeting many young priests, nuns, and seminarians. They all responded to their calling with fervour; in them, I saw God's grace and the hope of the Church."

Father Peter Choy, vicar general, also shared some inspiring thoughts. "First, I had the opportunity to meet with the five bishops of Sichuan Province, who were among the first pastors to receive theological education after the reform and opening up, growing up in difficult times with limited resources; their unwavering faith is truly admirable," he said. "Second, I had the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of the 'Sinicisation' of religion in the Catholic Church of Sichuan. Although Sinicisation is the political direction of Chinese society as a whole, its practice overlaps considerably with the Church's ongoing inculturation efforts. The Church should not view this as a scourge; rather, it should be seen as an opportunity for the Church to spread the Gospel and witness to the faith in contemporary Chinese society."

Ms. Susanna Ching, president of the Hong Kong Central Council of Catholic Laity, thanked the hosts for their hospitality and acknowledged their efforts to promote the Sinicisation of Catholicism. "The church square I visited had murals displaying the correspondence between socialist core values and biblical passages. This was the first time I had seen this, but whether the two can express the same meaning, and whether our understanding is consistent, remains to be investigated."

Italian missionary Father Franco Bellati, the local superior

Continued on page 2

Six SFU academics named among top global scientists

HONG KONG (SE): Six scholars from Saint Francis University [SFU] have been recognised among the world's top two per cent most-cited scientists in the prestigious annual rankings published by Stanford University. Their areas of expertise span nursing, social work, finance, and acoustics, aligning with SFU's key research disciplines.

The distinguished cohort features notable individuals from several faculties. In acoustics, Professor Andrew Leung Yee Tak was recognised, while the president, Professor Stephen Cheung Yan-leung, was honoured for his contributions to finance. The nursing discipline is represented by Professor Graeme Drummond Smith and Dr Jack Wong Ho. Professor Chiu Dah Ming and Professor Tsui Ming Sum were recognised in the field



From left: Tsui Ming-sum, Graeme Drummond Smith, President Stephen Cheung, Jack Wong, Andrew Leung and Chiu Dah-ming.

of social work.

Professor Cheung expressed pride in the achievement, noting that as a pioneering university of Applied Sciences in Hong Kong, the institution places equal emphasis on teaching and research.

He highlighted SFU's active promotion of applied research and knowledge transfer, encour-

aging scholars to use their expertise to address the needs of societal development.

Compiled by a Stanford research team using Scopus data, the global ranking assesses the top 100,000 scientists across 22 scientific fields and 174 sub-fields, evaluating key metrics such as citation impact and overall research output.



Cardinal Stephen greets the congregation at a concelebrated Mass at Yibin Cathedral, June 3.

Cardinal Stephen..Sichuan...Continued from page 1

of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions [PIME] in Hong Kong, said the trip gave him a firsthand experience of the current state of the Church in China. "From now on, I will have even more reason to pray for the Church in China," he said. Sister Chong of the Precious Blood Sisters also stated that the trip allowed her to understand the process of Christian inculturation, and that the exchanges deepened their mutual love and care.

While Father Paul Kam, vicar general, experienced a sense of "connection and communion" throughout the journey. This was evident during the Mass on June 3, when Cardinal Stephen, Bishop Ha, and Bishop Luo concelebrated, and in the interactions of praying together, sharing, and exchanging ideas.

Father Joseph Liu, assistant diocesan procurator, described

the visit to the Sichuan Catholic Seminary as a truly unforgettable experience. "We hope the Church can cultivate a spirit of synodality while integrating with Chinese culture. The Sinicisation of religion can be explored from various aspects, such as music, religious clothing and architecture, so as to enrich our faith."

For Permanent Deacon Louis Wong, "This experience was like a blessing, allowing me to see God's work in the Church in China and inviting me to be a bridge, promoting deeper communion and cooperation in love."

During the trip, there was a daily sharing session among the Hong Kong delegation. Father Joseph Chan, vicar general, pointed out that "through sharing our gains, we broadened our horizons and perspectives on this trip: we had the opportunity to enter the historical space of others and understand their thoughts at that time; and through empathy, we expanded our space for dialogue."

Reflections from the vicar general

By Father Peter Choy Wai-man

Artificial intelligence and theological education

In an era where AI is developing so quickly, it looks as though humans have mastered knowledge and efficiency like never before. Algorithms can analyse huge amounts of data, write fluent prose, and even mimic a kind of "understanding". However, in his pastoral letter, *Magnifica Humanitas* [Magnificent Humanity], published on May 25 this year, Pope Leo XIV reminds us that while technology can serve human beings, it cannot redefine them. This document is not just a reflection on tech ethics, it throws down a profound challenge to how we train theologians today.

The pope stresses that what makes us human isn't our computing power, but our inner freedom, spiritual depth, and our calling to love and worship God. This has a fundamental impact on theological work. If theological education stops at just gathering facts and logical analysis, it risks quietly adopting the mindset of the tech age—treating theology as an information system that can be totally mastered. Yet, theology is not purely an academic exercise. It is a response to God's revelation, a process where the whole person—mind, will, and heart—is transformed.

In the age of AI, theology students have access to more resources than ever before. Researching literature, translating languages, and organising data can all be done in the blink of an eye. But if these tools are used without inner discernment, they can actually make theological training shallower. This is because real theology is not just about "knowing things about God", but about "being shaped by a relationship with God". The pope reminds us that human dignity comes from our irreplaceable nature as unique individuals. Theological training must protect this personal core, turning learning into an act of responding to a calling, rather than just data processing.

Magnifica Humanitas points out that machines can mimic language but they cannot love; they can generate words but they cannot worship. This distinction is vital for theological education. The ultimate goal of theology is not precise phrasing, but leading people into prayer and worship. If training overlooks spiritual life and community fellowship, and focuses only on rigid theory and efficient results, it falls into a technical trap. That kind of theology might be precise, but it lacks life.

Therefore, in an AI environment, theological training needs to focus even more on three areas. First is the practice of silence and prayer. When the world is full of instant answers and quick results, students need to learn to be still before God, letting the truth settle in their hearts. Second is community life and shared experience. If God is a Trinity of loving community, theology cannot be studied in isolation at a lonely desk; it must grow through listening to and supporting one another. Third is building ethical and spiritual discernment. Learning how to use technology well, without letting it dictate our values, is an issue modern theology cannot ignore.

The pope is not rejecting AI; he is calling for a human-centred approach. The same goes for seminaries and theological colleges. Technology can be a helpful tool, but it cannot replace spiritual directors, community life, and real pastoral experience. At its heart, theology is an encounter between God and humanity, and an encounter cannot be replaced by an algorithm.

In an age that obsesses over efficiency and output, *Magnifica Humanitas* reminds us that a person's value does not lie in what they can do, but in their capacity to love. For theological education, this means the final goal is not to produce theoretical experts, but to form pastors and theologians who can love, pray, and give their lives for others.

When theological education stays true to this, it becomes a profound witness in a technological world: humans are not machines, but individuals made in the image of God; and true knowledge is only complete in love.



Members of the Hong Kong delegation share lunch with local religious sisters in the Diocese of Leshan following a visit to the Catholic church there on June 4.

At the centre is Sister Chong and first from the left is Susanna Ching.



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A culture of integration reaching out to the Putonghua community

HONG KONG (SE): The Diocese of Hong Kong is launching a major pastoral initiative to welcome and evangelise the city's rapidly growing Putonghua-speaking population. Father Bruno Lepeu, of the Paris Foreign Missions Society and coordinator of the diocese's Putonghua pastoral team, shared the diocese's vision for fostering a new culture of hospitality, care, and integration with the community.

The diocese hosted its first territory-wide Putonghua Mass on May 31, where Cardinal Stephen Chow presided over a commissioning ceremony for the new evangelisation teams [*Sunday Examiner*, June 7].

To manage resources effectively, the diocese established the Pastoral Team for Putonghua-speaking Faithful at the start of 2026. Led by Father Lepeu, the team operates through six sub-committees focusing on deaneries, schools, youth communities, formation, promotion, and developmental research.

Overcoming barriers through care

"The reason for serving new arrivals stems, first and foremost, from the love of God. That is, we need to take care of them," Father Lepeu said.

Rather than relying solely on formal activities, he emphasises a culture of consideration and friendship. With more Putonghua speakers entering local schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, simple gestures such as greeting neighbours or welcoming mainland parents can help combat isolation.



Above: Father Andrew Wang helped distributing the sweet soup after the first Putonghua Mass at St. Jerome parish, Tin Shui Wai, on May 16. Right: Putonghua community members enjoying a traditional big bowl feast during the Chinese New Year celebrations at Ss. Cosmas and Damian Parish, Tsuen Wan. Photos: supplied

The influx of mainland professionals and students has created distinct needs across different districts. The Northern District sees many cross-border students, while areas near the University of Hong Kong attract young professionals via the Top Talent Pass Scheme. New residential hubs such as Kai Tak and LOHAS Park are also experiencing a rapid rise in Putonghua speakers.

Therefore, he believes parishes should tailor their services according to the specific needs of the Putonghua-speaking population in their region.

Father Lepeu notes that local and Putonghua-speaking communities can learn from one another. For example, local parishioners tend to have thorough discussions in well-organised meetings, whereas the Putonghua-speaking communi-

ty prefers efficiency and flexible implementation.

The mainland tradition of hosting post-Mass refreshments can also help to foster a deep sense of belonging. Father Lepeu recommends parish coffee mornings as an excellent way to unite Cantonese, English, and Putonghua speakers.

To ensure long-term integration, the diocese is inviting all parishes to set up a Putonghua evangelisation team. These teams will operate directly under local parish councils, ensuring that newcomers become a genuine part of the community rather than temporary guests.

While acknowledging local hesitations, Father Lepeu stresses that being able to communicate in one's mother tongue offers an irreplaceable level of emotional openness. He encourages parishes to integrate Putonghua into their community events.

"It does not matter if our Putonghua is not perfect; they will still be touched to see our desire to connect with them," he said.

Currently, a pilot programme has been launched across Hong Kong's eight deaneries. Supported by native-speaking parish priests, these trial locations will offer catechism classes, Alpha courses, and various hobby workshops.

The initiative also promotes a



school-parish collaboration model, engaging Catholic schools as a primary point of contact to introduce new families to parish life.

School and parish collaboration

Dora Li, a member of the diocesan pastoral team, shared that its work began over a year ago at St. Joseph's Church in Kowloon Bay, supported by parish priest, Father Augustine Zaw Aung, and native-speaking assistant parish priest, Father Martin Chen.

Early efforts included a 2025 Christmas music event with Putonghua-speaking hosts to make families feel included. This was followed by a Putonghua-led parenting seminar on June 13 designed to help children develop confidence. She noted that the strong backing of priests and school principals remains the absolute key to success.

More success stories

Furthermore, and Divine Word Father Andrew Wang, vice coordinator of the Pastoral Team for Putonghua-speaking Faithful, noted that youth outreach began in mid-2025 to help mainland university students adjust to life in Hong Kong. Since October, the diocesan pastoral team has organised regular gatherings for both Catholic and non-Catholic students, such as visits to Wetland Park.

The team has also established

university cell groups to provide spiritual guidance to students and lecturers, and some members have already joined Putonghua catechism classes in different parishes. Looking ahead, the team plans to launch new cell groups for spiritual seekers and to organise a retreat camp in October.

At Ss. Cosmas and Damian Church in Tsuen Wan, where many migrants from Fujian province live in sub-divided flats, Father Henry Ng Kwok-po has successfully united local and mainland parishioners over the last decade through Putonghua liturgies and choirs.

Expanding this pastoral sister, Sister Marinei Pessanha Alves, partnered with the new "Extended Living Space" service of Caritas to launch, with the valuable assistance of parish volunteers, Cantonese classes for mainland mothers. Started in November 2024 with nine students, the programme has grown to 40 women.

At the same time, some retired teachers help their children with English reinforcement classes. This welcoming atmosphere has fostered a deep sense of belonging, and though these women are not yet Catholic, they now happily participate in major church events.

For new evangelisation groups, Sister Alves advises assessing local migrant needs and expanding gradually from existing foundations, with mutual learning and collaboration with other parishes.

Hong Kong Catholic Church
Sunday Mass Schedule
 You can obtain the Mass times and whereabouts of churches from the Hong Kong Catholic Church's website
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In Barcelona, Pope Leo XIV addresses forgiveness, faith, and mental health

BARCELONA (OSV NEWS): On June 9—the fourth day of his apostolic journey to Spain, Pope Leo XIV arrived from Madrid and began his visit to Barcelona with a midday prayer at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross and Saint Eulalia, greeted by crowds along the streets. “We are strong because we are united, and we are united because we are animated by the same Spirit,” he said.

That evening, at Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium, the pope was greeted with cheers as he arrived for a prayer vigil which opened with a performance of the *castell*—Catalonia’s tradition of building human towers—by a group from Vilafranca del Penedès.

Juan José Cardinal Omella, introduced the *castell* as a symbol of what people can accomplish “when we work together toward a common goal.” He noted the towers may have inspired Antoni Gaudí’s famous spires at the Sagrada Família.

Later, Pope Leo addressed tens of thousands, assuring them that God does not abandon those who suffer, even when his presence feels most distant, as he took questions from young people whose stories reflected the most difficult dimensions of human experience.

In a poignant moment, a young woman named Carmina described her years-long struggle with depression and a suicide attempt, asking the pope where God could be found “when the darkness is absolute and we cannot take it anymore.”

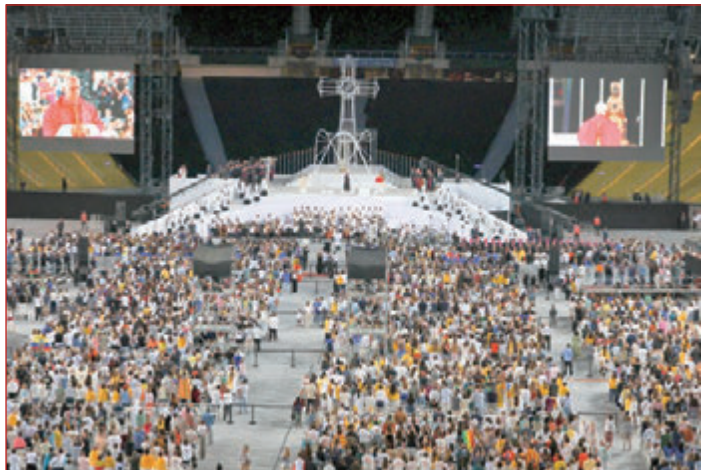
Pope Leo gave her a hug and called her presence “a remarkable miracle.”

He said, “I am moved that you are here among us and that you have found the strength to embrace this second chance that the Lord has given you. Through contact with Jesus, even those who feel lost regain confidence in life; healed of their illness, they can rise to live again.”

The pope drew on gospel accounts of Gethsemane and the Crucifixion to show how Christ entered into the deepest human suffering.

“In those dark hours, as he was dying on the cross, Jesus shared our pain and revealed to us the face of a compassionate God who bears our sorrows, who suffers with us, weeps our tears, and remains at our side with his presence full of love and mercy,” he said.

However, he cautioned against



Pope Leo attends a prayer vigil at the Lluís Companys Olympic Stadium on June 9. Photo: OSV News/Nacho Doce, Reuters

the spiritualisation of pain, saying, “God does not want suffering. He carries it with us and invites us to trust in him with perseverance.”

He urged those suffering not to face pain alone: “In times of pain, at least as much as possible, we must open ourselves to someone who can help us utter a simple prayer, who can accompany us with discretion without rushing to explain that pain, who can take us by the hand and lead us out of that cry.”

‘...we must not give up searching...and dialoguing with God...’

The pope made a direct appeal for expanded mental health care, calling the rise in psychological illness “a sign that there is something deeply wrong with a certain notion of progress that subjects people to pressures, expectations and tensions that compromise healthy balances.” He added, “We need a health care system that prioritises this invisible and widespread malaise, which also affects young people.”

A 20-year-old woman shared how her childhood was marked by domestic violence from her father, her mother’s subsequent drug use, and her own placement in a juvenile detention centre at the age of 10. She said her father tried to kill her mother, and she still struggles to forgive him, asking how genuine reconciliation is possible.

Pope Leo described forgiveness as a lifelong process: “We must continually ask the Lord—perhaps for our entire lives—to expand the space of love within us, precisely where we have been wounded.”

“We must learn to view forgiveness—that powerful remedy for evil that heals our inner wounds—as part of a process and a journey,”

he added.

He added that forgiveness does not require restored closeness, especially in cases of violence: “We can maintain a good disposition of heart toward the person, reject all forms of hatred or revenge, strive to repair the relationship as much as possible, and perhaps pray for him or her.”

The pope condemned domestic violence and femicide as a “toxic climate in family relationships” that demands a societal response.

A recently baptised young man shared his story. The pope commented, “Many young people and adults are rediscovering the Christian faith, sometimes after having drifted away from God over a period of time.”

Pope Leo said, “We are made for the infinite, and that is why every finite horizon, every step, every achievement—while satisfying us—also propels us forward and invites us to keep searching. Above all, to search by ‘going inward,’ that is, by delving deeper.”

He advised the new convert: “Try to walk this inner path together with others, allowing yourselves to be accompanied on the journey and engaging with priests, religious and people who, like us, have set out on this path.”

In closing, the pope reflected, “we are called to engage with the shadows of our own human condition: We lack the full truth; we do not fully fathom the mystery of ourselves or the true identity of others; we do not always succeed in understanding the hidden truth of the reality that surrounds us and the events unfolding before our eyes. We seek a light to illuminate the path.”

He added, “Even in the heart of night, we must not give up searching, questioning and dialoguing with God and with each other.”

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

14 JUNE 2026

Magnificent humanity in the age of artificial intelligence

WITH THE PUBLICATION of *Magnifica Humanitas* [Magnificent Humanity], Pope Leo XIV has entered one of the most important conversations of our time. Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming the way people work, learn, communicate, receive healthcare, and even wage war. Yet the pope’s first encyclical is not fundamentally about technology. It is about humanity.

At a time when the world is captivated by the promise and power of artificial intelligence, Pope Leo asks a simple question: what kind of society are we building, and whom does it serve?

The pope does not condemn artificial intelligence. He acknowledges its potential to improve lives and contribute to human development. What concerns him is the possibility that technological power may become detached from moral responsibility. When a small number of corporations control vast amounts of data, computing power, and digital infrastructure, important questions arise about accountability, justice, and the common good. The issue is not merely what AI can do, but who controls it, who benefits from it, and who may be left behind.

The pope’s reflections echo a long tradition of Catholic social teaching. More than a century ago, Pope Leo XIII responded to the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution through *Rerum Novarum*, defending the dignity of workers and calling for social justice. Today, Pope Leo XIV sees a similar challenge emerging in the digital revolution. Just as industrialisation transformed labour and society, artificial intelligence is reshaping human relationships, economic structures, and political life. Once again, the Church raises its voice on behalf of human dignity.

For the people of Hong Kong, this message deserves careful attention. As a global financial centre and one of the world’s most technologically connected cities, Hong Kong is embracing artificial intelligence across business, education, healthcare, and public services. Innovation is often welcomed as a sign of progress. Yet *Magnifica Humanitas* reminds us that progress cannot be measured solely by efficiency, productivity, or technological sophistication.

Ever since its inception, our diocese, which celebrates its 80th anniversary, has focused on the social welfare, education, and healthcare of the people of the city. The encyclical is particularly relevant for us in the areas of education and healthcare, where AI increasingly assists diagnosis, administration, and patient communication. Nevertheless, both education and healing remain deeply human encounters. Patients in our hospitals and students in our schools are not problems to be solved but persons to be accompanied. The quality of care is measured not only by technical excellence but also by empathy, respect, and human presence.

Pope Leo warns against allowing artificial intelligence to assume roles that rightly belong to human moral judgment. As discussions arise about autonomous weapons, algorithmic decision-making, and technology’s increasing influence over daily life, the pope emphasises that humanity must stay in control. Technology should serve people, not rule over them. Pope Leo reminds the world of a timeless truth: humanity, not technology, must stay at the centre. Our challenge is not just to build smarter machines but to become wiser, more compassionate, and more responsible custodians of the future we are shaping. *jose, CMF*

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Pope Leo's Corpus Christi Mass in Madrid draws 1.2 million

MADRID (OSV NEWS): More than 1.2 million people filled the streets of Madrid as Pope Leo XIV celebrated Mass and led a Eucharistic procession through the heart of the Spanish capital on June 7 for the solemnity of Corpus Christi—the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

“We are gathered around the Eucharist, the gift of Christ's living presence among us. He who wished to offer us his life so that we might enter into communion with the Father and become his children, is here as the living Bread come down from heaven, to nourish us with the very life of God, with a love stronger than death,” Pope Leo said in his homily.

“Just as Christ gives himself as food in the Eucharistic celebration, the procession shows that he is not confined to the church, but comes out to meet us,” he added. “Jesus travels the streets, crosses the squares and visits our neighborhoods, dwelling in the settings of our daily lives.”

The Mass was celebrated in the Plaza de Cibeles, the iconic neoclassical fountain square where several of Madrid's grand avenues converge, before the pope led the Corpus Christi procession that wound nearly 2.4 kilometres through streets adorned with elaborate floral carpets crafted by local artisans from more than 30,000 carnations. People in the crowd knelt and tossed flowers as the Eucharist passed by.

Children who recently received First Communion scattered flower petals and religious sisters carried candles near the front of the long procession of priests and bishops, culminating



Above: Pope Leo XIV celebrates Mass at Plaza de Cibeles in Madrid on June 7.

Photo: OSV News/Yara Nardi, Reuters

Right: Pope Leo XIV waves to crowds from the popemobile in Madrid on June 7.

Photo: OSV News/Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

at a gilded canopy under which Pope Leo carried the large monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament.

The elaborate floral carpets lining the Calle de Alcalá were created by artisans from the Galician town of Pontearreas, working alongside more than 160 volunteers. The 16 large carpets depicting Eucharistic and Christian symbols lined the streets.



“The solemn processions held on this day have for centuries shaped the piety, art, music, architecture and life of the Spanish people,” Pope Leo said. “Even today, they still express and manifest the spiritual sentiments of this country through the beauty and elegance of the floral carpets, the altars erected in the streets, the carefully crafted monstrances and stands, the hymns and the liturgical vestments.”

In his homily, Pope Leo reflected on the power of Eucharistic grace to transform people's lives.

“It is not merely a matter of bringing out the monstrance, but of allowing ourselves to be brought out of our selfishness and indifference, of a comfortable, private faith, so as to respond to his invitation to conversion, to change our perspective, and to welcome his presence which transforms us,” the pope said, telling people to live their faith courageously in the public square.

The pope said that the task of Spain today and in the future,

is to “ensure that the religiosity which has shaped and defined this country for centuries is not a museum of the past to be visited, but a school of faith from which to draw even today.”

In a country struggling with extreme political polarisation and unhealed wounds of the Civil War, Pope Leo said the living faith can transform society as “no one can kneel before the Lord” and at the same time “despise their brother.”

The Catholic roots of Spain can be “a school” that “teaches us of the gratuitousness of love that becomes a gift, so that it may flow among us and break the chains of all selfishness,” and one “from which we learn that God is a real presence and that we too are called to be present in the realities and challenges of society, not shying away, but personally committing ourselves to the building of the common good,” he stressed.

Pope Leo invoked St. Manuel González García, an early 20th-century Spanish bishop who

passionately urged people to recognise the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Today the saint is known as “the bishop of the abandoned tabernacle” because on his tomb in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel of Palencia Cathedral, it is written, “I ask to be buried next to a tabernacle, so that my bones after my death, like my tongue and my pen in life, may always be repeating to those who pass by: ‘Jesus is here! Jesus is here! Do not leave him abandoned!’”

Pope Leo said, “His life reminds us that the Eucharist should be honoured not only during great celebrations or on special occasions, but also through the silent fidelity of those who accompany the Lord with a humble and quiet friendship that is nourished day by day.”

The pope also drew on the poetry of St. John of the Cross, who, while imprisoned in Toledo around the time of Corpus Christi in 1578, found the Lord in the darkness of his cell, which the pope described as “a presence from which emanates a light that never fades.”

Crowds lined the major avenues leading to the plaza for hours before the Mass began, with 2,300 Eucharistic ministers needed to distribute communion to the assembled faithful. About 400 musicians provided music for the liturgy, including an orchestral ensemble.

For Spaniards, Corpus Christi remains one of the country's most beloved public expressions of faith and an example of how deeply rooted popular piety remains in Spanish culture.

“This is not an exhibition,” the pope said. “It is a profession of faith in the presence of the risen Lord, who is alive and continues to walk among us, who becomes bread to satiate our hunger for life, and visits the recesses of our hearts and history, even those shrouded in darkness.”

“May the Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, transform you into bread that is broken, given, and offered, so that a life of fullness may spring forth for you, for your families, and for your country.”

Christian harassment cases rise in Israel

JERUSALEM (OSV NEWS): There has been a sharp rise in reported harassment against Christians in Israel, according to new data presented June 4 by the Religious Freedom Data Centre. Founder, Yisca Harani, said more than 88 incidents have already been documented this year, including 63 in the second quarter alone, putting 2026 on pace to exceed last year's total of 181 cases.

Most incidents have occurred in Jerusalem's Old City and nearby Christian sites, ranging from spitting and verbal abuse to vandalism, grave desecration and attacks on religious symbols. Church representatives say such harassment is a daily reality, while authorities often describe the events as isolated acts by a small minority.

Speakers at the conference criticised limited police follow-through on complaints and urged victims to continue reporting incidents. Harani also pointed to underreporting within Christian communities as a challenge. Despite setbacks, organisers highlighted growing support from universities and hundreds of volunteers helping document incidents, accompany victims and advocate for greater accountability.

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Photo: Matanao National High School in Davao del Sur via Facebook

Religious leaders appeal after earthquake disrupts southern Philippines

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): The Conference of Major Superiors in the Philippines called for prayer and solidarity on Monday after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Mindanao on June 8. The quake killed at least 35 people and left communities across the southern Philippines facing widespread damage, power outages, and disrupted communications.

In a statement issued hours after the quake, the conference urged Filipinos to support affected communities through prayer and concrete acts of compassion.

“In this difficult time, let us come together in prayer for the safety, protection, and healing of all those affected,” the statement said.

Preliminary figures from disaster authorities showed 19 deaths, including 16 in the Soccsksargen region and three in Davao Occidental. At least 134 people were reported injured, and 12 remained missing, although officials said these numbers were still being validated.

Church workers in the affected region reported widespread disruption to infrastructure and ongoing difficulties reaching some communities.

As of June 9, the extent of the damage was still being assessed in several areas as communications and transportation networks remained disrupted.

Father Jerome Millan, social action director of the Diocese of Marbel, reported significant challenges in reaching affected communities.

“There are roads that remain impassable. There is no electricity in South Cotabato, General Santos, and Sarangani. Many buildings have been damaged,” he said in a text message.

Father Millan said church personnel had yet to establish contact with some vulnerable communities.

“We still have no news from our Indigenous peoples communities and from our community in Ned, Lake Sebu,” he said.

The earthquake struck off the

coast south of General Santos City, triggering tsunami warnings across parts of the region and sending metre-high waves into nearby coastal areas. A series of strong aftershocks followed, prompting evacuations in coastal communities and damage assessments across affected provinces.

Philippine president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. suspended classes across Mindanao and ordered residents in vulnerable coastal areas to move to higher ground as authorities monitored potential tsunami threats.

National government officials arrived in Mindanao on June 8 to coordinate response operations.

Officials from the Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development, and Department of Education also joined emergency response efforts.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council and the Office of Civil Defense in Soccsksargen raised their operations centres to Red Alert status as rescue, relief, and assessment operations continued.

The Conference of Major Superiors called on Filipinos to accompany affected communities through prayer and acts of solidarity.

“May the Lord strengthen rescue workers, comfort displaced families, and grant wisdom to leaders and responders as they provide aid and assistance,” the organisation said.

“Let us stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Mindanao—not only through our prayers but also through acts of compassion and support,” it added.

VATICAN (FIDES): Due to the civil war that has ravaged Myanmar since 2021, out of the country’s 17 dioceses, five bishops have been forced to abandon their episcopal sees and cathedrals and have taken up residence in parishes located in safer areas, far from the clashes between the army and rebel groups.

“They are the bishops of the dioceses of Pekhon, Loikaw, Bamaw, Mindat, and Lashio,” Bishop Felice Ba Htoo of Pekhon, in Shan State, explained as he described the suffering endured by the country’s pastors, who have witnessed their nation being scarred by conflict and the severe consequences for the population.

“We bishops have not been immune to this reality either. Many of our parishes have been closed because they have been damaged, attacked, or because they have lost their faithful,” he noted.

The bishops of Myanmar were recently at the Vatican for their ad limina visit, where they met with Pope Leo XIV on June 5. They discussed the situation in the country and prayed for peace and reconciliation.

“We don’t know what the future holds. We live in the present, trusting in God. Our task is to be close to the people, to the internally displaced scattered throughout the country: some in the jungle, others in refugee camps, others in villages less affected by the violence. We try to meet them, console them, and offer them a word of hope,” Bishop Ba Htoo said.

“With the Catholics, we celebrate the sacraments. We encourage them to live in a spirit of fraternity, cooperation, and mutual support, so that they can overcome this time of hardship,” he said. “People are weary and traumatised by a conflict that has continued for five years. In this context of trial and suffering, we live our pilgrimage of hope.”

Priests, religious, and cate-

In Myanmar, five bishops forced to leave their dioceses



Photo: Fides/RVA

chists remain close to the population, the bishop explained, preaching peace and reconciliation to prevent hatred from prevailing.

“We trust in God and pray for a time of light for our future,” he said.

Bishop Ba Htoo also described the serious humanitarian situation in the diocese, which has received at least 40,000 newly displaced people seeking safe areas, especially in the western part of the diocesan territory. Access to water has become a determining factor in the displacements.

“People are looking for places where there is water, because it is scarce in our area,” the bishop explained.

He noted that in the early years of the conflict, local communities generously shared land and resources, but after five years of war, the situation has deteriorated. “Now, residents must support their own families and no longer have resources to share. The humanitarian situation has worsened.”

Currently, thousands of displaced people live in more than 30 camps in the region, while others survive in makeshift settlements. Church life has also been profoundly affected.

“I had to leave the pastoral centre in Pekhon and move to a parish in a village dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. We have had to close about seven of the 16 existing parishes,” the bishop noted, adding, “Of the approximately 60,000 Catholics in the diocese, many have left their communities and moved to rural areas with their families.”

Destruction of churches and convents has also been reported, especially in the central area of the diocese, where the largest Catholic population and main infrastructure were previously

concentrated.

The diocesan priests, he added, are living alongside the displaced in the camps, sharing their daily lives. “People trust them and feel protected.” Religious men and women and catechists continue to sustain community life, ensuring, as far as possible, the celebration of Sunday Mass, the education of children, and support for displaced families.

“For us, priests and nuns, it is essential to accompany traumatised people. That is our main concern: to show them that the Lord continues to love them,” Bishop Ba Htoo stated.

With a touch of bitterness, the bishop concluded: “The situation is critical. Violence has plagued us for five years. People are exhausted, but they pray with tears in their eyes, with deep and sincere words. They pray the rosary, go to churches or makeshift chapels, and participate in Eucharistic adoration. This is no small thing: it means they maintain their faith in God and do not lose hope for a better future.”

Pekhon, in southern Shan State, is part of the southeastern front of the civil war, where episodic but persistent violence has been occurring. This is an area of great strategic importance due to its communication routes, where the forces of the military junta and the local People’s Defence Forces are clashing. In this complex and fragmented scenario, ethnic militias aligned with the government, such as the Pa-O National Organisation, have also been present.

The area remains contested and highly unstable, with clashes between the army—which maintains control of some bases and the main roads—and the resistance groups, concentrated in rural areas and the surrounding hills.

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Archbishop Machado on June 2.
Photo: UCAN/Christian Conference of Asia

Asia's Christians can't afford to be divided, says archbishop

CHIANG MAI (UCAN): Synodality and ecumenism are inseparable dimensions of the Church's life and mission, Archbishop Felix Anthony Machado, chairperson of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences [FABC] Office of Ecumenical and Inter-religious Affairs, told representatives of Christian denominations at the May 31-June 3 International Consultation on Ecumenism in Asia.

Christians across Asia need to deepen their commitment to dialogue, listening, reconciliation, and common witness as they journey together towards the visible unity of all Christians, Archbishop Machado said.

The international consultation titled, "Ecumenism in Asia: Emerging Ecclesial and Ecumenical Landscapes", was held at Payap. The programme was organised by the Christian Conference of Asia, a pan-Asian ecumenical organisation.

The archbishop delivered the second thematic address on "Synodality and Ecumenism: Ecclesial Unity for Effective Witness in Asia," emphasising that synodality and ecumenism are inseparable parts of "a shared Christian journey." He reflected on the Catholic Church's Synod on Synodality and its 2024 Final Document.

"The path of synodality is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal," he said.

Archbishop Machado highlighted the participation of delegates from different Christian traditions in the synodal assembly as a visible sign of growing collaboration, mutual learning, and

shared witness among Churches.

The archbishop noted that the synod's Final Document affirms baptism as the common foundation of both synodality and ecumenism.

"Since all Christians share one baptismal identity, the synodal journey naturally directs the Church toward greater Christian unity," he said.

He stressed that synodality is not an end in itself but serves the Church's mission of proclaiming the gospel, adding that authentic synodality requires prayerful discernment, mutual listening, humility, and openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Addressing the relationship between synodality and ecumenism, Machado described them as mutually reinforcing journeys rooted in baptismal grace.

Archbishop Machado noted that Christian unity is strengthened through prayer, dialogue, friendship, service, and common witness, enabling churches to overcome past divisions and work together for the sake of the gospel.

Synodality and ecumenism are crucial in the Asian context as ecclesial unity is important for a credible Christian witness.

"We Christians in Asia cannot afford to be divided in the face of the region's religious and cultural diversity and the pressing need to foster stronger bonds of fraternity among Christians," the archbishop stressed.

He encouraged Christians in Asia to continue bearing witness to the gospel through lives of service, the promotion of human dignity, harmonious coexistence with neighbours, and a faithful proclamation of Christ.

Rights groups warn anti-disinformation bill could be misused

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): Philippine human rights advocates and media organisations warned that a proposed anti-disinformation bill could give the government broad powers to regulate online speech, raising concerns about press freedom and the right to dissent.

The proposed Digital Media Anti-False Information Act passed second reading in the House of Representatives on May 26. Lawmakers say the measure is intended to combat troll farms, coordinated disinformation campaigns, manipulated media, and foreign influence operations that threaten democratic institutions and public trust.

The bill would criminalise the deliberate dissemination of false information that causes "verifiable public harm" or poses a "serious threat to national security." Those convicted could face six to 12 years in prison and fines of up to two million pesos. It would also require digital platforms operating in the Philippines to comply with new transparency and accountability rules under government oversight.

Human Rights Watch urged lawmakers to reconsider the measure, arguing that its provisions remain vulnerable to abuse despite safeguards intended to protect free expression.

"The Philippines' anti-false information bill has vague and overly broad language that the government can weaponise to silence free expression," said Lian Buan, Southeast Asia researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Buan said the proposal could affect not only individual speech but also "the independence of news organisations and other digital platforms."

The rights group expressed concern over provisions that would place significant regulatory authority in the hands of the Department of Information and Communications Technology [DICT], including oversight of large online platforms and coordination on moderation and take-down requests.

Human Rights Watch said the measure falls short of international standards governing restrictions on freedom of expression and warned that long prison terms and broad definitions of prohibited acts could discourage legitimate criticism of public officials and state institutions.

"The Philippines already has several laws that threaten free



Photo: EmbedSocial on Unsplash

speech," Buan said. "Adding this new bill onto that pile provides the government with sweeping powers to restrict speech that would further stifle Internet freedom and the free exchange of ideas and opinions."

Independent media network, *AlterMidya*, also opposed the measure, describing it as "a dangerous measure that potentially threatens free expression, press freedom, and the people's right to dissent."

'The Philippines' anti-false information bill has vague and overly broad language that the government can weaponise...'

In a June 1 statement, the group warned that allowing the state to determine what constitutes false information could "open the door to broader state censorship and intensified attacks against critical voices in the public domain, including journalists, activists, critics, and ordinary social media users."

AlterMidya also questioned the speed with which the proposal moved through the House.

"We are alarmed at the rushed manner by which the bill was approved," the group said, noting that it was elevated to the plenary immediately after committee approval and passed on second reading after only a brief debate.

The bill contains provisions stating that it should not be used to suppress political opinions, criticism of government, criticism of public officials, satire, investigative reporting, whistle blowing, public-interest advocacy, academic discourse, artistic expression, religious expression, and

other protected speech.

It also provides that merely liking, sharing, forwarding, or reposting content without actual knowledge of its falsity would not constitute a criminal offense.

But critics say those protections may not be enough.

AlterMidya pointed to previous controversies involving laws such as the Anti-Terror Law and Anti-Terrorist Financing Act, which rights groups say have been used against activists, journalists, and government critics.

"As we have seen in the actual implementation of laws such as the Anti-Terror Law and Anti-Terrorist Financing Act, vague and broadly worded legislation has often been used selectively," the organisation said.

The Council for People's Development and Governance raised similar concerns, warning that broad definitions of false information and severe penalties could be used against journalists, human rights defenders, Church workers, and civil society organisations.

The group argued that criticism, analysis, and opinion are often intertwined with factual reporting and could be vulnerable to broad interpretation by authorities.

Despite their opposition to the bill, rights groups acknowledged that disinformation remains a serious problem.

"Disinformation is a real problem that should be addressed," *AlterMidya* said. "But criminalisation, increased government control over online speech, and intensified platform surveillance are not the solution."

Instead, the group called for stronger support for independent media, media literacy programmes, greater transparency from public officials, and stronger protections for journalists and other truth-tellers.

General hotlines for Filipino migrant workers in Hong Kong

Philippine Consulate : 2823 8501
Consulate Hotline (after office hours) : 9155 4023
Hong Kong Immigration Department : 2824 6111
Hong Kong Labour Department : 2157 9537
Legal Aid Department : 2537 7677
Hong Kong Police (report hotline) : 2527 7177
Telephone number inquiries : 1081

Magnificent humanity challenged by the digital revolution

By Father Shay Cullen

The strong and clear challenge posed by Pope Leo XIV in his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, [Magnificent Humanity], declares the sacred value of every human life. It is a powerful statement of moral value that asserts the dignity and rights of every person. This comes at a time when people, especially women and children, are being deprived of their humanity and treated as objects to be exploited and abused, with their rights eroded or denied.

Human lives are being damaged almost beyond repair by a new kind of tyrant. Not the human kind that maims and kills, but a powerful, electronic force that has begun invading mobile phones—and by extension, the hearts and minds—of thousands of children and other vulnerable people. It is called artificial intelligence [AI].

AI can be a valuable tool for education, research, and programming machines and computers, but it is also a dangerous one that can be used to harm, exploit, and oppress people.

In the hands of unscrupulous tycoons and paedophiles, it can be abused for mass digital manipulation and exploitation, and for producing child abuse materials. It can also be employed to programme drones and other aircraft, as well as lethal weapons in autonomous warfare.

Pope Leo makes clear the dan-

The addiction of children and adults to social media platforms and illegal content is a corrupting influence...

gers inherent in AI abuse.

Government agencies around the world use AI algorithms to discriminate against some people. These algorithms can be designed to identify and systematically eliminate or block certain individuals from gaining access to education, employment, loans, and healthcare. AI programmes can discriminate based on a person's colour, race, social status, and educational or ethnic background.

This is what lies behind the social justice crisis that Pope Leo discusses in his encyclical. It places people, their dignity, and their rights before digital power, and challenges the tycoons who use AI without control or constraint to earn billions of dollars. The AI-based decisions made using data collected from people are "tainted by prejudice and injustice," the pope says.

Pope Leo argues that tech tycoons hold a monopoly over powerful technology programmes, and billions of people are now dependent on them. These tycoons control the content that people read, listen to, and experience. Many have been manipulated and exploited by

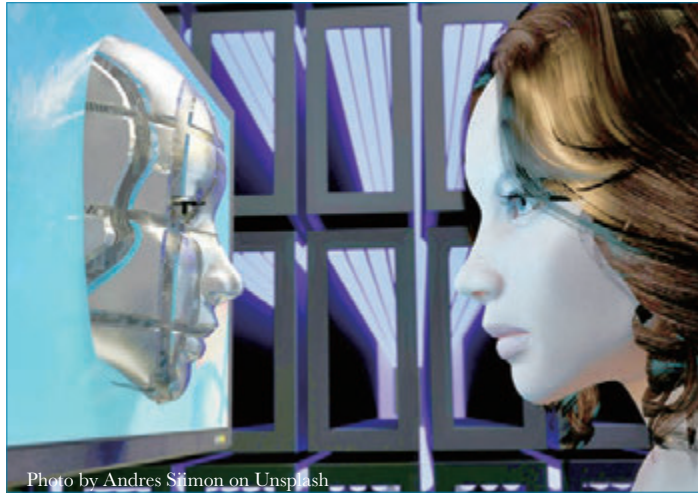


Photo by Andres Simon on Unsplash

these AI programmes. This is what Pope Leo is denouncing.

The AI-driven algorithms used by these tycoons are gathering personal data and working like secret law enforcers, treating people's private lives as raw material to be exploited, owned, and monetised without their participation or consent. Pope Leo considers this massive collection of personal information a digital form of imperialism, calling it "digital neocolonialism".

By using the AI capabilities of their search engines, these tech companies acquire, through their platforms, personal health records, genetic data, and demographic information of millions of people, especially in politically weaker or developing nations such as the Philippines, where users are unaware they are being digitally exploited every time they open their computers or

mobile phones.

This data is used to train predictive AI models that expand this exploitation and generate profit for corporations through advertising, and even political manipulations to influence elections. Connectivity between people through their social media platforms may be helpful, but in general, these platforms do not serve humanity.

'Mere cogs in a system'

Some corporations are using AI to gather personal information on millions of people and sell this to corporations and government agencies for surveillance purposes. Other bad actors can also use that information to harass, threaten, and blackmail or extract money or sexual favours from others, especially children. It can be said that personal privacy is almost non-existent for millions of people using AI-driven tools.

This is what Pope Leo is challenging in *Magnifica Humanitas*. He clearly denounces a business mindset that reduces people to commodities, where every human choice is dictated exclusively by measures of efficiency and profit.

Pope Leo warns that this reduces human beings to "mere cogs in a system" and risks making society view vulnerable lives—such as the sick, elderly, or impoverished—as less useful, even disposable.

Among those leading the AI industry and promoting the technology's benefits for humanity is Chris Olah, co-founder of the company Anthropic, which developed an AI tool called Claude AI. It is an AI assistant capable of highly advanced reasoning, document analysis, and mathematics.

Olah joined Pope Leo in the Vatican Synod Hall, where he said AI companies must follow an ethical code of conduct, and

developers must be held accountable.

"We need informed critics who will tell the labs when we are failing. We need moral voices that the incentives cannot bend," Olah said, speaking for AI developers with a moral conscience who live by a code of ethics.

Olah acknowledged that computer scientists alone cannot determine ethical boundaries. He said the driving forces behind these developers are not of a spiritual or ethical nature, but are continuously influenced by incentives such as ambition, competition, and financial pressure.

He also said companies like his need structured moral guidance to guard against "incentives and constraints that can sometimes conflict with doing the right thing".

Doing the "right thing" is to develop AI software that serves humanity and protects both children and adults by detecting, blocking, and erasing damaging child abuse images. The work of the Preda Foundation is helping young victims of sexual abuse, including cases where 12- and 13-year-old boys have raped six-year-old girls.

The abusers have been influenced by easily accessible sexual abuse images viewed on their phones. Pope Leo, in *Magnifica Humanitas*, explicitly warned that providing personal mobile devices to children at too early an age without supervision "exacerbates their vulnerability to online exploitation, grooming, and extortion".

We can add to that the moral corruption of young people by the AI-driven internet, which cannot distinguish right from wrong and is driven by AI-generated images that encourage sexual assault against children.

Pope Leo said modern corporate AI algorithms are designed to propagate and display images that attract viewers, especially young people, to buy digital connections to get online and view illegal images. This is intended to maximise profits.

The addiction of children and adults to social media platforms and illegal content is a corrupting influence that must be stopped. Some countries, such as Australia and Indonesia, have passed legislation restricting minors from accessing social media platforms, and more nations are planning similar measures. The Philippines should do likewise to protect its children and national dignity.

Renewable energy agreement between Holy See and Italy enters into force

VATICAN (SE): In a statement released on May 28, it was announced that the agreement signed by Italy and the Holy See last year to build an agrivoltaic plant in the Vatican's Santa Maria di Galeria area, just outside of Rome, had formally entered into force on May 27, *Vatican News* reported.

The extraterritorial area of Santa Maria di Galeria has hosted Vatican Radio's transmission facilities since 1957 and the initiative aims to provide the Vatican City State with renewable energy while preserving agricultural use of the land.

The project is rooted in Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which notes that in a world where there is still a "minimal access to clean and renewable

The extraterritorial area of Santa Maria di Galeria has hosted Vatican Radio's transmission facilities since 1957

energy," there remains "a need to develop adequate energy storage technologies."

Pope Francis himself launched the initiative with the motu proprio [on his own initiative] *Fratello Sole* [Brother Sun] on 26 June 2024, instructing the presidents of the Governorate and the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See to carry out the necessary acts in order to build

the system.

Vatican News reported that the agreement was signed by Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher, Secretary for Relations with States and International Organisations, and the Italian ambassador to the Holy See, Francesco Di Nitto, on 31 July 2025.

Less than a year ago, during a visit to the Santa Maria di Galeria area on 19 June 2025, Pope Leo XIV inspected the space designated for the plant, saying it represented "a wonderful opportunity" and a clear "commitment from the Church" to provide "an example to the world—one that is very important."

He said that we must truly care for the entire world, for all of creation, "as Pope Francis has taught so clearly."

Notice Board



Eco-Friendly cultural showcase marks diocesan 80th Anniversary

On May 25, the Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Filipinos and Simbayan-KAMMPI co-organised an ethnic cultural presentation at the Mother of Good Counsel Church in San Po Kong, Kowloon to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong's foundation.

The day commenced with a Mass celebrated by the group's spiritual director, Father Rodolfo Jacobe OMI, along with Father Roy Paciente OMI and Father Andrei Paz ssc, who delivered the homily. Following the Mass, spiritual adviser, Good Shepherd Sister Corazon Demetillo, discussed the diocese's history and its legacy of supporting the vulnerable. She highlighted that Hong Kong hosts nearly 400,000 foreign domestic workers, half of whom are Filipinos, and quoted Cardinal Stephen Chow SJ, who had described them as joyful "Messengers of Hope".

The main programme, themed "Messenger of Hope", was held in the hall and attended by roughly 600 guests. Participants showcased diverse Filipino ethnic cultures wearing costumes made entirely from recycled and upcycled materials like plastic bags and newspapers. After the Philippine national anthem and opening prayers, KAMMPI president Imelda Mertula welcomed the audience, and spiritual adviser Sister Victoria Victorino PDDM gave a message. Sister Victorino emphasised ecological awareness and the interconnectedness of nature and culture, praising the participants' eco-friendly creativity. She also explored the concept of faith, acknowledging the courage of migrant workers who risked moving to Hong Kong, and urged them to remain hopeful.

The cultural performances were divided into two segments, separated by a lively musical interlude by Penny Salcedo, which got the audience, priests, and sisters dancing. Thirteen community groups performed traditional dances and received awards, including the Mother of Good Counsel Community (Most Colorful), St. Thomas Community (Most Ingenious), Our Lady of Mount Carmel



The performances of St. Alfred's English-speaking community (above) and Our Lady of Rosary Community (right) and Holy Cross English-speaking community (below).



Community (Most Resourceful), Star of the Sea English-speaking Community (Most Inventive), and St. Alfred's English-speaking community (Most Beautiful).

Angel Wong from the Caritas Asian Migrant Workers Social Service Project praised the performers' creative costumes and invited people to join an upcoming Green Vibes Fashion Show.

Father Jacobe concluded the successful event with closing prayers. SE



Living out our prayers: finding comfort in faith and action

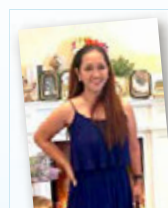


Aside from praying, I rely on scripture—especially passages like Psalm 34:18—and let it sink in until it becomes stronger than my emotions. I also speak with a trusted person who shares my faith—not for instant answers, but simply to be seen in my struggle. Sometimes we pray together, recall God's past faithfulness, or just sit quietly. The Word and a wise friend become true anchors when prayer feels difficult.

— Mylyn Cabigona

While prayer helps, I also intentionally seek quiet time away from noisy surroundings to find comfort and inner peace. This stillness allows me to think more clearly as I reflect, journal, listen to music, read, or simply give myself space to process what I am feeling. Sometimes we truly need these quiet moments because, in the stillness of our hearts, we can hear God's voice more clearly.

— Anggie Comando-Digo



When I feel overwhelmed by financial burdens or unexpected expenses, I take a deep breath and surrender the rest to God. Knowing I have done my part, I trust him completely. Time and again, his help arrives through unexpected outreach, timely blessings, or doors I didn't see coming. When I think I am at my limit, that is exactly when God makes a way. If he carried me yesterday, I trust he will carry me today.

— Maricel Palacios

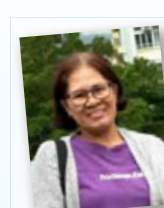


Yes, I talk to a trusted person during hard times. Having someone who listens without judgment provides vital emotional support, making me feel less alone and more understood. Although sharing what's on my mind can be difficult at first, it ultimately makes my problems feel lighter and even strengthens my personal relationships.

— Elisa Ramos

Aside from prayer, I find strength in intentional stillness. I step away from the chaos, acknowledge my feelings, and then redirect my focus toward simple joys like music, watching YouTube, or taking nature walks. When things get too heavy, I reach out to a trusted friend or family member. Being heard without judgment offers immense comfort and reminds me that I don't have to carry everything alone.

— Liezl Rubic



When I need strength or comfort, I talk it out. Sharing my thoughts and feelings acts as an emotional release—similar to journaling, but through conversation. This practice reduces isolation and reminds me that I am always supported by family, friends, and most importantly, by God, who never abandons us. Amen.

— Lourdes Tabian

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest — Matthew 11:28



YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

JUNE 14 – ELEVENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the Sunday, *Gloria*, Creed, Preface of Sundays (green). Readings: Exodus 19:2-6a; Romans 5:6-11; Matthew 9:36 — 10:8.

JUNE 15 – MONDAY: ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: 1 Kings 21:1-16; Matthew 5:38 - 42.

JUNE 16 – TUESDAY: ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: 1 Kings 21:17-29; Matthew 5:43-48.

JUNE 17 – WEDNESDAY: ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: 2 Kings 2:1, 6–14; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18.

JUNE 18 – THURSDAY: ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: Sirach 48:1-15; Matthew 6:7-15.

JUNE 19 – FRIDAY: ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: 2 Kings 11:1-4, 9-18, 20; Matthew 6:19-23.

JUNE 20 – SATURDAY: ELEVENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME.

Mass of the day (green). Readings: 2 Chronicles 24:17-25; Matthew 6:24-34.



Apostleship of Prayer

Themes for June 2026

For the values of sports

Let us pray that sports be an instrument of peace, encounter, and dialogue among cultures and nations, and that they promote values such as respect, solidarity, and personal growth.

Eleventh Sunday of the Year

Exodus 19:2-6a;
Readings: Romans 5:6-11;
Matthew 9:36 — 10:8

We all hope that something new will emerge in our world, that chaos will give way to order, and that peace, justice, and respect for each individual will reign.

The evangelist Mathew began his Gospel by introducing the vision and Mission of Christ through the Sermon on the Mount. After the long discourse on the mountain, Matthew narrates ten healings and wonders Jesus performed for humanity. He wants to tell us that Jesus' Word brought healing and changes in people's lives; his Word makes all that is inhuman disappear from the world. The Gospel heals us from our inabilities and enables us to see the face of God and listen to the voice of God.

In Jesus, God fulfilled this promise and has personally come to care for the sick humanity. God revealed himself in Jesus as

Jesus has a mission for you!

someone emotionally involved and compassionate for humanity's pain. But Jesus makes it clear that he will not accomplish this mission alone. He calls on us to join his mission, to be a part of the healing of a broken world.

There are two tasks that Jesus asks us to carry out: to cast out unclean spirits and to heal all kinds of sicknesses and diseases. This means that we are called to give continuity to his work of salvation, and to carry out this mission, he gives us the power to perform wonders, to expel unclean spirits. Unclean in the Bible means everything contrary to life. They are the demons; they are called envy, jealousy, hatred, grudges, and

always desire to possess more goods, to dominate and to enslave others.

These demons create a ruthless world where the other is seen as a rival, an enemy, not as a brother or sister to love. These demons must be cast out from each person's heart because we are all possessed. Seeing the large crowd, the Lord says, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are only a few; therefore, ask the master of the harvest to send workers to gather his harvest. "We are the workers, and we must join together to cast out the demons of hatred and division and replace them with the love of God.

Mathew names the 12 apostles, including himself. Number 12 represents the 12 tribes of Israel. In

Jesus' time, not everyone in Israel believed in God. One betrayed the Master; another denounced the Master thrice... Despite their infidelity and weaknesses, Jesus assigns them with the mission.

For example, how come Judas Iscariot also got selected? Was he a wrong choice? A theologian had an interesting answer: "I am not sure if Judas was a wrong choice, but I have an even harder question: Why did Jesus choose me?" Because he has a mission for you.



● Father Josekutty Mathew CMF



Lahat tayo ay umaasang may bagong dadating sa ating mundo—na ang kaguluhan ay mapapalitan ng kaayusan, at maghahari ang kapayapaan, katarungan, at paggalang sa bawat isa.

Sa Ebanghelyo ni Mateo, ipinakilala ang misyon ni Kristo sa pamamagitan ng Sermon sa Bundok, na sinundan ng sampung himala ng pagpapagaling. Ipinapakita nito na ang Salita ni Hesus ay nagbabago ng buhay at nagpapakayod sa anumang hindi makatao. Pinagagaling tayo ng Ebanghelyo upang makita at mapakinggan ang Diyos.

Kay Hesus, tinupad ng Diyos ang kanyang pangakong kalingain ang may-sakit na sangkatauhan. Ipinakita niya ang isang Diyos na

may malasakit sa ating dusa. Ngunit hindi niya ito gagawin mag-isa; tinatawag Niya tayong makiisa sa pagpapagaling ng sugatang mundo.

Dalawang tungkulin ang iniatas ni Hesus: magpalayas ng masasamang espiritu at magpagaling ng sakit. Binigyan Niya tayo ng kapangyarihang ipagpatuloy ang Kanyang gawaing pagliligtas. Sa Bibliya, ang "marumi" ay anumang kalaban ng buhay—ito ang mga demonyo ng inggit, galit, poot, at kasakiman na

nagiging dahilan upang ituring ang kapwa bilang kaaway sa halip na kapatid. Dapat palayasin ang mga demonyong ito sa ating mga puso. Sa pagkakita sa maraming tao, sinabi ng Panginoon: "Masagana ang aanihin, ngunit kakaunti ang manggagawa." Tayo ang mga manggagawang iyon na dapat magkaisa upang pawiin ang poot at palitan ito ng pag-ibig ng Diyos.

Binanggit ni Mateo ang 12 apostol na kumakatawan sa 12 tribo ng Israel. Sa kabila ng

kanilang mga kahinaan at pagtataksil—tulad ng pagtatwa ni Pedro at pagtatraydor ni Judas—ipinagkatiwala pa rin ni Hesus ang misyon sa kanila.

Maling pili ba si Judas? Isang teologo ang nagwika: "Hindi ko alam kung maling pili si Judas, ngunit mas mahirap itong tanong: Bakit ako ang pinili ni Hesus?" Pinili ka niya dahil may misyon siya para sa iyo.



● Claretian Publications

The month of June is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In 2002, Pope St. John Paul II established this solemnity as the World Day of Prayer for the Sanctification of Priests. This alignment highlights the profound connection between the Sacred Heart and the priesthood. In his 1992 apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (I shall give you shepherds), St. John Paul II emphasized that future priests must be formed "in the spirituality of the heart of the Lord."

Priesthood and the sacred heart: called to love as Jesus Loved

Devotion to the Sacred Heart has deep scriptural and patristic roots. Many Church Fathers recognized that the Church flowed from Christ's pierced heart on the cross. In Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Second Vatican Council taught that "the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church" came forth from the side of Christ. St. Ambrose noted that just as Eve was formed from the sleeping Adam's side, the Church was formed from Christ's pierced heart.

Popes have consistently encouraged this devotion. In his 1956 encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* (You will draw waters), Pope Pius XII pointed to the Sacred Heart as the symbol of Christ's threefold love: divine, spiritual, and sensible. Pope Leo XIII, in *Annum Sacrum* (Holy Year), described it as an image of infinite love that moves us to love one another.

The Sacred Heart is vital to the ministry of priests, who act in the person of Christ. Pope Benedict XVI explained that as an alter Christus (another Christ), the priest is profoundly united to the Word of the

FAITH ALIVE!



blood, soul, and divinity through sacred ministry.

Priests must also be formed by the Sacred Heart as ministers of reconciliation. In *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy) Pope Francis urged the Church to center this sacrament so people can touch God's mercy. To embody this, priests must seek forgiveness themselves. St. John Paul II noted that receiving absolution reminds priests that "before being ministers, we are all members of the same people, a 'saved' people."

There is also a mystical dimension to this formation. St. John Eudes described the priest as the heart of the Mystical Body, circulating Christ's blood to vivify its members. Venerable Louise Margaret Claret de la Touche wrote that the priest must enter through the Sacred Heart to become a "brilliant mirror in which infinite love can be reflected."

She pointed to the Blessed Virgin Mary as the ultimate model, asserting that a priest's love for Jesus should mirror Mary's love for her Son. In June, priests are called to renew their devotion to the Sacred Heart in union with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, trusting the Mother of Priests to form their hearts like her Son's.

● Robert Fastiggi, OSV News

Malaysia to grant status to Rohingya asylum seekers, address labour shortages

KUALA LUMPUR (ASIANEWS/AGENCIES): In mid-June, the Home Affairs Ministry of Malaysia will present the cabinet with a new, comprehensive plan to manage more than 200,000 refugees and asylum seekers living in the country.

Announced in July last year and formally starting on June 1, the initial operational phase of the Refugee Registration Document [DPP] framework involves mostly Rohingya refugees and other asylum seekers held in the country's immigration detention centres.

So far, some 4,000 people have been registered, mostly Rohingya from Myanmar, where they are denied citizenship.

According to Malaysian authorities, the new system will give legal status to the refugees and improve their security and living conditions.

The programme also seeks to encourage the employment of



people aged 20 to 40 in sectors suffering from chronic labour shortages, like manufacturing, agriculture, construction, and the tertiary sector.

Some estimates indicate that legal access to employment for refugees could boost Malaysia's GDP by some US\$750 million over five years, with also benefits in terms of tax revenue.

The new framework provides

protections to workers, including the obligation for employers to comply with national regulations, and pay the minimum monthly wage, around US\$430, and provide adequate housing.

However, the reform has generated mixed reactions. Business associations believe it could help reduce reliance on irregular for-

Rohingya refugees waiting to receive goods from volunteers in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Photo: CNS /Lim Huey Teng, Reuters

eign workers, who are often more expensive to manage. Human rights organisations, on the other hand, are calling for transparent procedures and concrete guarantees against abuses and exploitation, which many refugees already endure.

For its part, the government has made it clear that the DPP is not a path to permanent residency. Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and has always viewed the issue through the lens of security and public order, proving unwilling to allow external inspections of refugees'

actual conditions.

Regularisation appears to meet the need to boost the labour pool for sectors experiencing shortages.

"Malaysia must make this scheme work by ensuring confidentiality, due process, collaboration with the UN Refugee Agency, and safeguards against detention, forced returns, and data misuse," said John Quinley, director of the NGO Fortify Rights, which works with Rohingya refugees.

"Ultimately, the DPP will only be meaningful if it protects refugees rather than leaving unaddressed refugees' risk of arbitrary immigration control," he explained. "The government should ensure that no refugee or asylum seeker is arrested, detained, or deported because they are still waiting to be processed".

Macau's key role in Asian Christian mission

MACAU (UCAN): Divine Word Father Andrzej Miotk observed that Macau has played an instrumental role for centuries in spreading the Christian faith across East Asia, serving as a hub for missionary training and cultural exchange, according to the Polish priest who has studied the history of Asian missions.

For almost four centuries, Macau has been a strategic platform, a training centre, and a base for spreading the Christian faith across China, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia, according to an interview in *Jornal O Clarim*.

The interview, which discussed several aspects of Asian missions, was conducted after Father Miotk taught an intensive course on the history of Asian missions in the Diocese of Macau. This year marks the 450th anniversary of its establishment as a diocese by Pope Gregory XIII.

"Macau's role and its relationship with other Asian missions are unique and extraordinary," said Father Miotk, who holds a doctorate in Missiology from St. Augustine University in Bonn, Germany.

"In Asian evangelisation, Macau made all the difference," Father Miotk said, pointing out that Macau was a gateway to China—where all missionaries, including Jesuits, wanted to go—and then to Japan, as Macau had strong relations with both.

Macau also had a strong connection with Japan, as some Japanese Catholics who fled persecution took refuge there, he added.

"Macau was always a base, a structure that favoured the expansion of Catholic missions. At the time, it was the largest centre for the education, preparation, and training of missionaries," he said.

"It was truly the best place a missionary could be," Father Miotk said, adding that "without Macau, the developments that later materialised would not have occurred."

Over the centuries, around 700 missionaries—mostly Jesuits—have been trained in Macau, including 400 non-Portuguese from 16 different nations.

"It was not just a place for training but also a place for exchange," he said.

The missionaries who converged in Macau "created a dynamic of exchange that led the Jesuits to make Macau the place where the method of inculturation was perfected, and where missions destined for Japan and China were planned."

The presence of seminarians and students from different countries also helped them study languages and become familiar with diverse cultures, Father Miotk said, noting that these are key necessities for mission work.

The deep root of St. Benedict

By Faith, Hope and Agape,

A member of the World Community for Christian Meditation, Hong Kong

One autumn a few years ago, after returning from a long trip abroad, I walked into a prayer meeting that I had not attended for months. My heart was weary and dry, worn thin by miles and motion. At the time, I had long believed that the more I travelled, the more I saw, the richer my soul would become.

I pushed open the door. An elderly gentleman with a head of white hair sat quietly before me. A table nearby was laid out simply with quiet reverence: a cross, a Bible and a few icons, and six prayer sheets neatly set out, as if waiting for people who might or might not appear. At five past eight, the clear chime of a singing bowl sounded, and the room slowly settled into a deep silence.

That evening, an indescribable peace fell over me. It seeped into my parched heart like morning dew softens the dry soil. When the meeting ended, and I helped put away the prayer sheets, I could no longer hold back my question: "I almost didn't come tonight. If I hadn't shown up, you would have been here all alone. Why did you lay out six places?"

The elderly man looked up, without stopping what he was doing. He spoke in a tone as ordinary as stating the simplest thing in the world: "For the past five years, I have come each week. I prepare what needs to be prepared." He paused for a moment, offering me a quiet smile. Then his eyes moved past me and rested on the cross at the center of the table. "I come for the Lord," he said softly, "to spend time alone with him."

At that moment, a quiet tremor moved within me. I saw clearly the pattern buried deep within me: I was always concerned with the number of people who showed up, the visible results, and how others responded. But this old man paid no heed to the empty chairs. From beginning to end, he had kept his focus on God alone.

In that moment, I finally understood: his perseverance was not born of extraordinary willpower.

It flowed from a heart that never looked away from the One. "Fixing one's eyes on the Lord"—this, I realised, was the deepest root. It brought to mind St Benedict's teaching. The saint discouraged monks from wandering from place to place; instead, he called them to *stabilitas*—stability: the discipline of taking deep root in one place, one community, one calling. Do not give up lightly on your community. Do not give up lightly on your brothers and sisters. Do not give up lightly on yourself.

In today's world, such fidelity sounds almost unimaginable. We have grown so accustomed to changing our surroundings, our relationships, even our identity the moment difficulties arise. When a prayer practice grows mundane, we go looking for new spiritual techniques. When we become disillusioned with one group, we look elsewhere. When a marriage becomes too difficult to navigate, we begin to harbour thoughts of separation.

Yet the wisdom of St. Benedict reminds us: true depth is never found in constantly changing external forms. It is found in remaining faithful to the present moment, embracing whatever stands before us—even boredom, loneliness, imperfection.

Stability is spiritual courage. It invites us to choose one place and dig deep, until we strike the hidden spring of living water. For that elderly man, steadfastness came not from a sense of duty, but from love. What he kept alive was not a meeting, but a living connection with the Lord.

If at this moment, you feel weary or dry on your spiritual journey—convinced that the next method, the next book, the next gathering will finally satisfy you—perhaps it is time to pause. Return to the place where you first met the Lord. Return to the simplest, most unadorned prayer. Even if you come alone. Even if no one sees you. Come simply to him.

The spring of living water is not far off. It is in the very soil beneath your feet, the ground you have chosen to faithfully tend.

'Be human as Christ is,' Pope Leo XIV tells half a million youth in Madrid

MADRID (OSV NEWS): "The mission I entrust to you is precisely this: that you be human," Pope Leo XIV urged half a million young people gathered in Madrid, Spain, on June 6 during an evening prayer vigil in the Plaza de Lima. "Yes, be human: men and women of flesh and blood! Not mere appearances, but trustworthy faces."

He urged them, "Be human as Christ is."

The gathering drew approximately 500,000 people and combined music, testimonies, Marian devotion and Eucharistic adoration in what organizers described as a "festival of faith." Young people began arriving hours before the pope's appearance, filling the plaza and surrounding streets in the heart of the Spanish capital.

The scale of the gathering became apparent as Pope Leo tried to reach the stage. The journey along Madrid's Paseo de la Castellana stretched for more than 20 minutes as the popemobile moved slowly through the sea of pilgrims, repeatedly stopping while the pope greeted the faithful. Along the route, he embraced worshippers lining the barriers and kissed dozens of babies passed forward by their parents.

Many others watched from apartment balconies and terraces overlooking the broad boulevard, creating a continuous presence along the route connecting the



city center to the vigil site.

When he finally arrived at the stage in Plaza de Lima, the welcome only intensified. Thousands of young people waved Vatican and Spanish flags and broke into chants of "Esta es la juventud del Papa" ([This is the pope's youth]. Pope Leo appeared visibly moved as he paused to take in the scene before Jose Cardinal Cobo of Madrid began the final part of the evening's programme.

Departing from the formal settings often associated with papal events, the dialogue unfolded on a stage arranged like a living room.

There, young people and the pope spoke about faith, vocation and the search for meaning, creating the impression of a conversation between generations united less by age than by a common desire to follow Christ. The exchange followed a performance from "Godspell," the musical produced by actor, Antonio Banderas, which helped set the tone for an evening organisers described as a "festival of faith."

In dialogue with young people, Pope Leo reflected on saints who shaped his spiritual life, including St. John Chrysostom, St. Thomas

of Villanova and St. Turibius of Mogrovejo, the Spanish missionary bishop who evangelised Peru in the 16th century.

Asked about his own missionary years in Peru, the pope said he most treasured the witness of faith shown by people who faced hardship without losing hope.

"As I proclaimed the gospel, I too was transformed by it," he said. "I have seen how the Word of God can transform conflict into peace, can be a source of reconciliation, peace, and justice."

Pope Leo also encouraged young people to seek silence amid the noise of contemporary life.

"When we seek silence, we choose what not to listen to and which noises not to let distract us," he said. "It is in silence that we come to understand that ideologies pass away, while the truth always remains."

Pope Leo connected that directly to the Eucharistic adoration that followed, during which the entire square fell silent.

"Eucharistic adoration, which we share this evening, is the perfect place to be silent, to open our hearts, and to 'be' ourselves in the presence of the Lord," he said.

Turning to the role of Christians in contemporary society, Pope Leo reminded the crowd that "Jesus' disciples are always people of their time, but never prisoners of a passing era."

He urged young Catholics to become missionaries in today's world, including in digital spaces, and challenged them to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world."

Laura Blanco, who travelled to Madrid from Burgos with a group of 15 friends, said she sees that missionary spirit already at

Young people as Pope Leo XIV holds a vigil at Plaza de Lima in Madrid, on June 6.

Photo: OSV News/Mohammed Salem, Reuters

work among young people. Two members of her group were baptised as children but grew up in nonreligious households, she said.

"They knew we were coming, they knew the pope was coming, and they wanted to join us. One of them comes to Mass with me every day now. We study together, and we end the day by going to Mass," Blanco said.

She added with a blush, "I think he likes me. I know I like him. Seeing how important my faith is to me, I think he's trying to get to know it well enough to see if he can live with it."

Prior to Pope Leo's arrival at Plaza de Lima, pilgrims prayed the rosary's luminous mysteries, with meditations offered by young people and accompanied by sacred art from Madrid's Prado Museum.

It was the prelude of the city's "White and Yellow Night," during which some of Madrid's most important museums, including the Prado, opened their doors free of charge to pilgrims and visitors ahead of the pope's Mass and the Corpus Christi procession on Sunday.

As they waited, giant screens replayed images from the visits of Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI to Spain. Special attention was given to the 2011 World Youth Day vigil at Madrid's Cuatro Vientos airfield, where pilgrims endured extreme heat and a violent storm before joining Pope Benedict in Eucharistic adoration.

Father José Gabriel Vera Beorlegui, spokesperson for the Spanish Bishops' Conference, said the pope's visit comes at a moment when many people are searching for hope amid global instability.

"The visit of Pope Leo XIV to Spain is a reason for joy for the whole Church," he said. "People are anguished by war, anger, violence, lies and corruption in the world. Christ is the light that will help the Church in Spain, but also Spanish society, move forward."

As darkness settled over Madrid, the music and celebrations gave way to silence as hundreds of thousands of young people joined Pope Leo in Eucharistic adoration, bringing to a close an evening that connected Spain's Catholic past with a new generation being called to shape its future.

Padre Pio shrine in Batangas elevated to international status

MANILA (SE): The Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation elevated the National Shrine and Parish of St. Padre Pio in Batangas, the Philippines, to international shrine status, according to a decree issued on May 25, on the birth anniversary of St. Padre Pio, CBCP News reported.

The parish, in the town of Sto. Tomas, made the announcement public on June 4.

This makes the church the second international shrine in the Philippines, following the International Shrine of Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage in Antipolo City.

Church officials described the recognition as a 'milestone' expected to deepen pilgrimage activity and strengthen devotion among Filipino and foreign devotees.

"May this historic milestone inspire us to deepen our faith and devotion as we journey together



Photo: CBCP News

in prayer and thanksgiving," they said.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines endorsed the bid during its plenary assembly in July 2024, unanimously supporting the application.

Church leaders cited the shrine's strong pastoral and devotional significance across Asia, with support from several Asian bishops' conferences helping to bolster the case for Vatican recognition.

Archbishop Gilbert Garcera of Lipa previously noted that regional support strengthened the application for international shrine status.

The 12-hectare shrine in Sto. Tomas began as a small chapel in 2003, became an archdiocesan shrine in 2008, and was declared a national shrine in 2015.

It now draws hundreds of thousands of pilgrims seeking healing and devotion to St. Padre Pio, the Italian mystic known for his stigmata and healing ministry.

The shrine also houses first-class relics of the saint, whose life and reported miracles continue to inspire global Catholic devotion.

Preparations are underway for the formal declaration of the international shrine on September 23, the feast day of St. Padre Pio.