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<http://www.examiner.org.hk> • sunday@examiner.org.hk

tel: 2522 0487 • fax: 2521 3095

Pope Leo to new priests: Keep Church door open, don't be an obstacle

(OSV NEWS): At the priestly ordination of 10 deacons on April 26, Pope Leo XIV urged them to keep the Church open to a “suffering humanity” and not “be an obstacle to those who wish to enter.” In his homily at St Peter’s Basilica, he described the priesthood as embodying Christ’s “patience and tenderness” and encouraged priests to “keep the threshold open and direct others to it, without using too many words.”

He added, “Today more than ever, especially when statistics seem to indicate a divide between people and the Church, keep the door open! Let people in, and be prepared to go out. This is another secret for your life: You are a channel, not a filter.”

According to Vatican News, about 5,000 family and friends attended the ordination Mass.

Pope Leo began declared, “This Sunday is full of life.” He added that “although death surrounds us,” Jesus’ promise—that he came “so that they might have life and have it more abundantly”—was fulfilled.

“We see great generosity and enthusiasm in the willingness of these young men whom the Church calls today to be ordained as priests,” the pope said. “As a numerous and diverse community gathered around the one Master, we feel a presence that renews us. It is the Holy Spirit who unites people and vocations in freedom, so that no one lives for themselves any longer.”

He reminded them that the stronger their bond with Christ, “the more radical your belonging to all of humanity,” binding their hearts to “an indissoluble love.”

He compared priestly love to spousal love: “the love that inspires celibacy for the Kingdom of God must also be guarded and constantly renewed, for every true affection matures and becomes fruitful over time.”



Pope Leo XIV celebrates the ordination Mass of 10 priests in St. Peter’s Basilica on April 26.

Photo: OSV News/Elisabetta Trevisan, Vatican Media

“You are called to a specific, delicate and difficult way of loving and, even more so, of allowing yourselves to be loved in freedom,” he said. “This will make you not only good priests, but also honest, helpful citizens, builders of peace and social friendship.”

Reflecting on the gospel, the pope said Jesus knows “the cruelty of the world, where he walks with us.” This, however, does not “deter him from giving up his life,” the pope said.

“Denunciation does not become renunciation; danger does not lead to flight. This is another secret for the life of the priest: We must not be frightened by reality. It is the Lord of life who calls us. May the ministry entrusted to you, dear brothers, convey the peace of those who know that they are safe, even amid dangers,” he said.

Pope Leo observed that seeking security can “make people aggressive, cause communities to close in on themselves and lead people to seek out enemies and scapegoats.” Despite these fears, he urged the new priests to ground their security “in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as well as in your participation, along with your people, in the story of salvation.”

“This salvation is already at

work in the many good deeds quietly carried out by people of goodwill in the parishes where you will join them as fellow travellers. What you proclaim and celebrate will protect you, even in difficult times,” he said.

Pope Leo said Jesus’ reminder that he is the gate means “he does not stifle our freedom,” unlike “communities that suffocate; some groups are easy to enter but are impossible to leave.”

“This is not the case of the Lord’s Church, nor of the community of his disciples,” he said.

“We all seek shelter, rest and care,” the pope explained. “The Church’s doors are open, but not to cut us off from life: life does not end in a parish, in an association, in a movement, in a group. Whoever is saved can ‘go out and find pasture,’” he said.

The pope invited the new priests to “go out and discover culture, people and life” and to marvel “at the things that God makes grow without our having sown them.”

“The people you will serve as priests—lay faithful and families, young and old, children and the sick—inhabit pastures that you must come to know,” he said. “At times it will seem to you that you lack the necessary maps. But the Good Shepherd has them; listen to his very familiar voice.”



Pope Leo XIV speaking with journalists aboard the papal flight from Angola to Equatorial Guinea on April 21.

Photo: CNS /Lola Gomez

Pope Leo stresses unity, broader moral priorities on return from Africa

ROME (SE): Pope Leo XIV emphasised the need for unity in the Church and a broader understanding of moral priorities, as he responded to questions from journalists aboard the papal flight returning to Rome on April 23.

Speaking after a pastoral visit to Algeria, Cameroon, Angola and Equatorial Guinea, the pope appeared relaxed as he addressed a range of issues, including same-sex blessings, migration and diplomatic engagement with politically sensitive nations.

Responding to a question about the decision of Archbishop Reinhard Marx of Munich, to permit priests in his diocese to formalise blessings of same-sex couples, Pope Leo underscored that Church unity should not be reduced to debates over sexual morality.

“It’s very important to understand that the unity or division of the Church should not revolve around sexual matters,” he said. “We tend to think that when the Church is talking about morality, the only issue is sexual. In reality, there are much greater and more important issues, such as justice, equality, the freedom of men and women, and freedom of religion.”

The pope noted that the Holy See has already addressed the matter with the German bishops, reiterating that it does not sup-

port the formalisation of blessings for same-sex couples or those in irregular unions beyond what was previously indicated by Pope Francis.

He explained that blessings offered by the Church—such as those at the end of Mass or major liturgical celebrations—are extended to all people. Quoting Pope Francis’ oft-cited phrase “tutti, tutti, tutti” [everyone, everyone], Pope Leo affirmed that all are welcome in the Church and invited to follow Christ and seek conversion.

At the same time, he cautioned against developments that could deepen divisions within the Church. “To go beyond that today,” he said, “the topic can cause more disunity than unity. We should look for ways to build our unity upon Jesus Christ and what he teaches.”

Pope Leo’s remarks reflect his broader emphasis on peace, dialogue and ecclesial communion—priorities that have marked his pontificate to date.

The in-flight exchange formed part of a wider press conference in which the pope also addressed geopolitical concerns, including recent tensions involving Iran, as well as questions related to migration and engagement with countries facing political challenges.

Cardinal urges young people to embrace vocation over utilitarianism

HONG KONG (SE): To mark the 63rd World Day of Prayer for Vocations, a carnival and a Mass to pray for vocations were held at Wah Yan College, Kowloon, on April 25. Guided by the theme “Messengers of Hope”, the event served as both a celebration of the diocese’s 80th anniversary and a call to the younger generation to consider a life of religious service amidst an increasingly secular and utilitarian world.

The crisis of calling

In his homily at St Ignatius Chapel, Cardinal Stephen Chow S.J. reflected on the ongoing need for religious vocations and the Church’s responsibility to provide spiritual guidance, much like Pope Leo XIV’s recent advocacy for moral values in today’s challenging world. “The world needs voices capable of speaking on spirituality, morality, and values with authentic authority—an authority that comes from lived experience after formation,” he said.

Addressing young people’s reluctance to pursue vocations, the cardinal acknowledged concerns about financial security, the rigours of religious life, and fear of failure. He warned against the dangers of extreme individualism and utilitarianism, where personal success is prioritised over the well-being of society and the environment. “I hope everyone, especially the young people, won’t just look out for themselves, or have no other pursuits besides studying, landing a good job, and having a good family,” he said. Without spiritual commitment from the younger generation, he cautioned, the world risks becoming bleak and selfish.

He drew a parallel to Jesus Christ, who experienced fear and agony before his passion yet accepted the “bitter cup”, recognising the redemptive value of his suffering for humanity’s salvation.

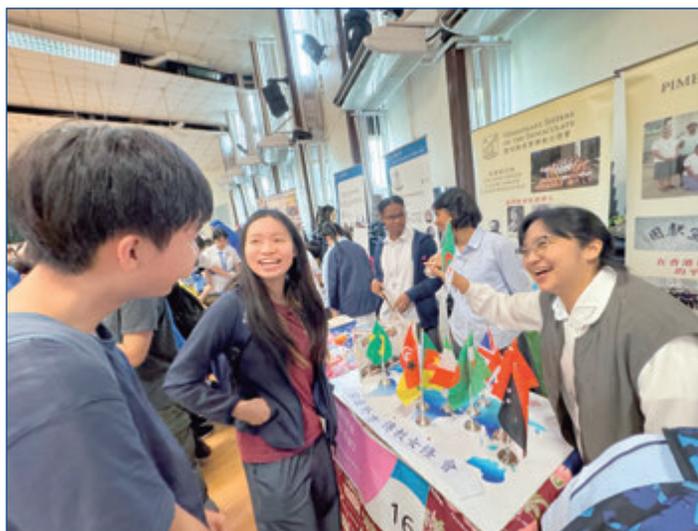
On the other hand, he called on the Church to honestly evaluate its priestly formation pro-



Above: Cardinal Stephen and concelebrants with participants after the Mass for vocations at St. Ignatius Chapel, Kowloon, on April 25. Photo: Diocesan Vocation Commission



Left: Nine-year-old Gabriel Ng [centre in orange], who aspires to be a priest, singing the anniversary theme song with others.



Below left: Young people participate in the carnival.

grammes to ensure that they truly support and encourage young people. The cardinal encouraged young people not to fear fail-

ure, stressing that success often comes to those willing to stumble. He urged them to enter into discernment—listening for God’s call with guidance from spiritual mentors—and called on parents and elders to support these aspirations.

Planting seeds of vocation

Before Mass, vicar general, Father Paul Kam Po-wai, officiated the opening ceremony, which included 22 diocesan organisations and religious congregations. Each group hosted interactive booths to make spir-

itual concepts more accessible through engaging activities.

The Divine Word Missionaries used a “steady-hand” wire game to symbolise life’s challenges, teaching that focusing on the Word of God helps avoid spiritual despair. Meanwhile, the Sisters of the Precious Blood led a craft activity where children made mosaic crosses in red—representing the Precious Blood—as reminders for prayer and as a way to foster connection with the wider Church community.

The event concluded with a spirited rendition of the theme song, led by the Salesian Youth Movement. Father Kam noted that the combination of the song and historical footage of the diocese’s 80-year journey evoked a deep sense of mission. He encouraged the children and young people to find joy in the festivities while remaining open to their unique divine callings.

Gabriel Ng, a primary three student from Yaumati Catholic Primary School, was among the few who raised his hand when Father Kam asked if anyone wished to become a priest. Inspired by his family friend, Father Bruno Lepeu of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, he expressed a sincere belief that the priesthood is a meaningful path. His mother, Julie Leung, viewed the carnival as a vital opportunity for Gabriel to explore various religious orders beyond the Paris Foreign Missions Society, supporting his early interest in a vocational life.

World Children’s Day delegates also attended the carnival. Valarie Chiu shared that while she had considered a religious vocation during her 2024 visit to Rome and meeting with Pope Francis, on this occasion she simply wanted to enjoy the event with fellow delegates.

Young people seeking support for vocational discernment were able to approach Sister Carmela Pamei and Father Clement Tsui in a designated area.

On Vocation Sunday, April 26, Masses were also celebrated in different parishes in Hong Kong by members of the Diocesan Vocation Commission.



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Gathering of Chinese-speaking bishops strengthens regional ties



Church leaders from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Malaysia gathered in Taipei on April 22.

Photo: supplied

HONG KONG (SE): A historic gathering of Catholic leaders from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Malaysia recently took place at the Archdiocese of Taipei. The milestone event underscored a unified commitment to mission, synodality, and cultural connection within the Chinese-speaking community.

On the evening of April 22, Archbishop Thomas Chung Anzu as well as bishops from the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference [Taiwan] joined Cardinal Stephen Chow S.J. and Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Ha Chi-shing of Hong Kong, Bishop Stephen Lee Bun-sang of Macau, and Archbishop Simon Poh of Malaysia for a fraternal gathering.

Archbishop Chung welcomed the bishops and noted that the event represented one of the largest gatherings of bishops from Chinese-speaking regions. Bishop John Baptist Lee Keh-mien, president of Taiwan's bishops' conference, emphasised that missionary work requires the collective effort of all companions to enhance the impact and power of their witness.

Cardinal Stephen shared his happiness at the gathering of brothers for further exchanges

and cooperation. "The exchange is important. It is also the wish of the Holy See to promote more understanding among Chinese-speaking bishops for the sake of synodality. This is what we need to do and it is a good beginning," he said, expressing hope for such annual dialogues in different locations and the eventual inclusion of bishops from mainland China in the fraternal circle.

"I really hope that one day the mainland bishops will be with us. This is a very big wish of mine, and I believe it is the wish of everyone here," the cardinal said.

The evening concluded in prayer before the image of Mary, Untier of Knots, followed by a fraternal dinner.

On the morning of April 23, the bishops reconvened at the chancery chapel of the Archdiocese of Taipei for a concelebrated Mass presided by Archbishop Chung.

Concelebrants included Auxiliary Bishop Peter Chao Yung-chi of the Archdiocese of Taipei; Father John Lai Shou-chung, general secretary of the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference; bishops from all seven dioceses in Taiwan, alongside the visiting bishops.



Celebrants and participants of the Mass at the chancery chapel of the Archdiocese of Taipei on April 23. Photo: supplied

it is specifically through receiving the Body of Christ that they can regain strength, hope, and the guidance needed to practice charity.

"I believe that through the exchanges between our bishops, we will surely be nourished and guided by the Word of God and by Jesus, who is the Bread of Life for us," Archbishop Chung said.

Following the Mass, the leaders held discussions on future collaboration and development for the Church across the Chinese-speaking world.

In his homily Archbishop Chung, identified "faith" and "receiving the Eucharist" as the two pillars of spiritual life, defining them as the fundamental forces for overcoming spiritual hardships and discerning one's direction.

He emphasised that when believers feel discouraged or lost,

Reflections from the cardinal

By Stephen Cardinal Chow, S.J.

Set them free, let them rise



Today we have heard of the scathing attacks on our Holy Father by someone who is supposed to be the leader of the strongest nation on earth.

The public response so far has been disbelief, feelings of insult, and deep hurt.

As our Holy Father has rightly stated, his role is not that of a politician but of a peacemaker, proclaiming the truth of the Gospel. That is, God does not want war but peace for all. The truth is that wars as moral issues cannot be just as they imprison people, innocent ones in particular, locked in a state of loss, fear, helplessness, bitterness and hate, with violence and killings happening throughout.

"While war only devastates communities and the environment, without offering solutions to conflicts, diplomacy and international organisations are in need of new vitality and credibility." Extracted from Pope Francis' letter to Luciano Fontana, editor in chief of the Italian newspaper "Corriere della Sera" dated 14 March 2025, less than two months before his passing.

In contemporary history, popes such as Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis, and now Leo XIV *have all spoken out for peace and against war*. Our world *desperately* needs peace — everyone deserves peace. In peace, we can breathe freely with hope and joy. In the Season of Easter, we have our gaze fixed on the risen Lord. Our hope for eternal peace and joy should be ever so real.

Another dimension of Pope Francis' message is that diplomacy and the accompanying dialogue have lost a lot of their credibility recently. Sadly so, sincere diplomacy and genuine dialogue were missing in the processes leading up to wars.

Like any relationship, when respect and trust are absent, it becomes superficial and fragile. We cannot tell others that they are part of us when we simply look down on them or treat them as disposable. We need to treat them with fairness and respect, and genuinely be interested in their welfare and in helping them out of their low points. Easter is not just about coming back to life but about rising into a new and transformed life for eternity.

But there are individuals in our society who might be walking freely, but are in fact 'captured' by public stereotypes, unable to enjoy a respectable life. Here, I would like to briefly mention two groups for our genuine reflection.

The first group comprises of sexual minorities, especially our fellow Catholics. Many of them choose to remain in our Church, but they are neither acknowledged nor treated with respect. Nowadays, some use ideological terms to condemn them, such as gender identity which is arguable in the first place. Because some from this group prefer to adopt a more assertive stance to gain recognition, the entire group becomes a target of segregation and marginalisation by their pastors and congregations. In fact, most of our sisters and brothers in this group just want to be respected and publicly acknowledged for who they are and as equal members of the Church. They are not trying to have the Church change her teaching on the issue.

The second group comprises of ex-prison inmates. Research has repeatedly indicated that former inmates with little support from families, friends, and their social communities have a higher likelihood of re-offending. Imagine you are an ex-inmate with a not-so-serious criminal record. You are trying to engage yourself in a study program or a career of your desire. However, because of your criminal record, you have no choice but to abandon your quest after unsuccessful appeals. These repeated setbacks leave you ever more lonely and increasingly vulnerable to the recruitment of your 'former' undesirable friends.

We are all God's children, loved and called into a deeper relationship with God through conversion. This all-loving and inclusive God is much different from our narrow-mindedness, demanding near-perfection from others. Yet everyone — whether a sexual minority, or a former inmate, or not — has their own journey of conversion to travel and in their own paces. So, in the spirit of Easter, are we prepared to let go of our personal and communal stereotypes, so that the victims of our prejudices can be set free and eventually rise with Christ?

+ Stephen Cardinal Chow, S.J.

Anglicans and Catholics must work to overcome differences, pope says

(OSV NEWS): Although the path to full communion has become “more difficult to discern,” Catholics and Anglicans must persevere in dialogue and “proclaim Christ to the world,” Pope Leo XIV said in his first meeting with Anglican Archbishop Sarah Mullally of Canterbury on April 27. The pope acknowledged that although progress has been made on “historically divisive issues,” new problems in recent decades have made the “ecumenical journey” more challenging.

Nevertheless, he said, it “would also be a scandal if we did not continue to work towards overcoming our differences, no matter how intractable they may appear.”

According to a statement from the archbishop’s office, Archbishop Mullally joined the pope for midday prayer in the 17th-century Chapel of Urban VIII, located in the Apostolic Palace.

Welcoming the archbishop of Canterbury to the Vatican, Pope Leo observed that “our suffering world greatly needs the peace of Christ,” but divisions among Christians diminish their ability to share that peace. He emphasised, “If the world is to take our preaching to heart, we must, therefore, be constant in our prayers and efforts to remove any stumbling blocks that hinder the proclamation of the gospel.”

He stressed, “This focus on the need for unity for the sake of a more fruitful evangelisation has been a theme throughout my own ministry; indeed it is reflected in the motto I chose when I became a bishop: ‘In Illo uno unum’, ‘In the One—that is Christ—we are one.’”

While the ecumenical path is complex, Pope Leo said the Catholic Church and the Church of England continue to “journey together in friendship and dialogue.”

He also prayed that the Holy Spirit, “will guide our steps as we prayerfully and humbly seek the unity which is the Lord’s will for all his disciples.”

“Your Grace, in thanking you for your visit today, I pray that the same Holy Spirit will remain with you always, making you fruitful in the service to which you have been called,” the pope said.

Archbishop Mullally thanked Pope Leo for highlighting “the many injustices in our world,” particularly during his visit to Africa, saying, “The world need-



Pope Leo prays with Anglican Archbishop Mullally of Canterbury in the Chapel of Urban VIII in the Apostolic Palace during their meeting on April 27.

Photo: OSV News /Simone Risoluti, Vatican Media

ed this message at this time—thank you.” She reflected that people, despite suffering, aspire to a fuller life and many work daily toward the common good. She observed that, in the ecumenical journey, the “Holy Spirit is inviting us into a deeper practice of hospitality, not simply as welcome, but as a form of ministry.”

It is “a willingness to make space for one another as those created in the image of God and called to grow more fully into his likeness,” she said. “Already, we receive from one another gifts we cannot generate alone: depth in prayer, courage in witness, perseverance in suffering, and faithfulness in service. In these, our common witness is strengthened.”

Recalling King Charles III and Queen Camilla’s visit to the Vatican in October, Archbishop Mullally said the British monarch “valued his recent visit” and assured Pope Leo “of a warm welcome from the Church of England should you honour the United Kingdom with a visit.”

Appointed as archbishop of Canterbury by King Charles in October, Archbishop Mullally is the first woman to lead the Church of England “in its 1,400-year history,” according to the Diocese of Canterbury.

Anglicans claim 1,400 years of history, identifying the Church of England not as a new entity instigated by Henry VIII during the 16th-century Reformation, but as the continuation of the church established by St Augustine of Canterbury in 597AD.

Archbishop Mullally’s meeting with Pope Leo was part of

a four-day pilgrimage to Rome, intended “to strengthen Anglican–Roman Catholic relations through prayer, personal encounter, and formal theological dialogue.”

According to the Anglican Communion News Service, the archbishop of Canterbury’s visit reflects the enduring ecumenical relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church, which began with the landmark 1966 meeting of Archbishop Michael Ramsey and Pope Paul VI.

The pilgrimage began on April 26 with a visit to St. Peter’s Basilica and the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome to pray before the tombs of the apostles. In a tweet posted on X, Archbishop Mullally called for prayers “for the unity of his disciples and all God’s people.”

She wrote, “Our world is deeply wounded by war, division and fear, and it longs for the peace, justice, reconciliation and hope that are found in Jesus Christ alone. We are called to proclaim and live this gospel together, for the sake of the life of the world that God so loves.” Following her meeting with Pope Leo, Archbishop Mullally presided over vespers at the Church of St. Ignatius of Loyola, with Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation as homilist.

According to the archbishop’s office, Archbishop Mullally will appoint Anglican Bishop Anthony Ball, director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, as her representative to the Holy See.

EDITORIAL

SUNDAY EXAMINER

3 MAY 2026

Solidarity and care for workers

MAY 1 is International Workers’ Day, celebrated across the globe. But why is this day a public holiday? Its origins date back to 1 May 1886, when a massive strike erupted in downtown Chicago. Workers called for better conditions and the implementation of an eight-hour workday. Tragically, the strike escalated into violent conflict, resulting in casualties among both the police and the public.

This tragedy galvanised workers worldwide to fight for fair treatment. On 14 July 1889, the international labour movement organisation, the Second International, passed the ‘May Day Resolution’, designating May 1 as International Workers’ Day—both to commemorate the tragedy and to call for global attention to labour rights.

On 1 May 1955, Venerable Pope Pius XII addressed the Christian Association of Italian Workers and proposed St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, as the Patron Saint of Workers [cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 47, 1955, 406]. This emphasised that work is both sacred and dignified. St. Joseph was a carpenter who laboured tirelessly to provide for Mary and Jesus, sanctifying daily toil through his faithfulness.

The Church has always prioritised the working class, advocating for fair wages, dignified working environments, and social justice. In Hong Kong, the Diocesan Commission for Labour Affairs shapes its direction and projects in response to social developments and the needs of workers. The committee and its affiliated labour and pastoral centres have spared no effort in policy advocacy and in providing regional support services for many years, standing alongside grassroots workers and assisting them in overcoming various challenges in their work and daily lives. As the commission celebrates its 35th anniversary this year, it is a timely opportunity to reflect on past achievements and prepare for future challenges.

On 1 May 2026, the Hong Kong government implemented a significant labour measure, raising the statutory minimum wage from HK\$42.1 to HK\$43.1 per hour. Furthermore, since January 16, the government has implemented the 4-6-8 rule for calculating continuous contracts. Under this rule, employees who work at least 18 hours a week or a total of 68 hours over four weeks are entitled to statutory holiday pay and paid annual leave, with employment benefits such as paid sick leave also included. While some view these changes as a broader safety net for worker welfare, others have highlighted a ‘side effect’: some employers, seeking to reduce costs, have significantly cut the hours of part-time staff. This has resulted in underemployment and financial strain for those who rely on flexible work.

According to government labour statistics, from January to March this year, the number of unemployed rose from 135,000 to 137,000, while the number of underemployed fell from 63,000 to 60,000. With many Hong Kong residents now preferring to travel north to mainland China for shopping and leisure on weekends, the local economy has inevitably felt the impact. In this chain reaction, companies often resort to cutting staff or reducing hours to save costs—and the working class is always the first to feel the sting.

As workers struggle for survival, St. Joseph the Worker reminds us not to forget our brothers and sisters. It is a call for the Church to remain steadfast in defending workers’ rights and striving for their well-being. *SE*

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Address all correspondence to the editor of the Sunday Examiner.

Lebanese Christians rejoice over new Christ statue brought by Italian soldiers



Italian soldiers with the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon stand alongside a new statue of Jesus crucified in the village of Debel, on April 22, joined by the papal nuncio, Lebanon Archbishop Borgia, and parish priest Father Felefli. Photo: OSV News/courtesy Debel alert

(OSV NEWS): Christians in Debel, Lebanon, are celebrating the gift of a new statue of the crucified Jesus after a recent act of desecration by two Israeli soldiers drew global outrage [*Sunday Examiner*, April 26].

“The townspeople of Debel are so very happy and appreciative to have their statue of Jesus Christ once again present among us,” Lebanese Father Fadi Felefli, the parish priest at St. George Church, said by phone.

“Yesterday [April 22], Lebanon’s papal nuncio, Archbishop Paolo Borgia came to Debel for the installation of the statue in our town,” he said. The village is one of the few Christian villages in the south of the country where residents have remained during Israel’s war with the Iran-backed Shiite Hezbollah militia—part of the broader Iran war.

The Israeli Defense Forces [IDF] removed two soldiers from combat duty and placed them in military detention for 30 days after they destroyed the town’s crucifix. The social media picture of an Israeli soldier taking the blunt side of an axe to a fallen sculpture of the crucified Jesus drew worldwide condemnation on April 20 and apologies from Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and other officials.

Father Felefli said that the new statue, which resembled the one that had been destroyed, came with the assistance of Italian troops serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon [UNIFIL] which includes soldiers from 48 nations serving

in southern Lebanon.

A video posted on Facebook showed blue-helmeted UNIFIL soldiers from Italy carrying the statue wrapped in a white cloth which they tenderly removed as one soldier could be seen planting a kiss on the head of Jesus on the crucifix. It was then taken inside the town’s church where it was displayed before the congregation and later erected outside by the townspeople.

Italy’s prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, thanked the Italian soldiers, saying: “I thank Commander Diodato Abagnara and the entire Italian contingent of UNIFIL for their decision to donate a new crucifix to the Lebanese village of Debel.”

Meloni said, “The images of the statue’s delivery to the community and its placement, in the same spot where the statue was destroyed a few days earlier by an IDF soldier, fill my heart and convey a powerful message of hope, dialogue, and peace.”

One Lebanese woman, Alice Hajj, posted on Facebook: “Hallelujah ... JESUS will never leave us, we are a people who believe in him and live in him every moment in our lives.”

One unnamed townspeople said, “We believe that God, in his divine power, has put Debel on the world map to protect it, to hear its voice, and to remind the world that faith is never defeated, no matter how dark it gets.”

The person said, “He who destroyed the cross did not realize its meaning. ... After the cross comes the resurrection. What

some thought is weakness has become our strength. The cross was and will remain our protector, our hope and the sign of our salvation.”

Father Felefli said in a video posted on the site: “Recently our suffering has increased greatly. It has deeply wounded our homes and broken hearts,” recounting the deaths of a Maronite Catholic Father Pierre al-Rahi, and others in southern Lebanon as a result of the war between Israel and Hezbollah that started on March 2. Numerous houses and businesses have been destroyed.

“We have faced many obstacles, but we are steadfast because we have placed our trust in God,” the priest said.

Father Felefli said that the Israeli Defense Forces made a gift of a different crucifix to the town “which is now inside the church.”

On April 23, Michel Constantin, the Lebanese regional director for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association [CNEWA]-Pontifical Mission in Lebanon and Syria, said, “Only the papal nuncio to Lebanon was allowed by the Israeli military to travel to Debel because he is a foreigner.” Constantin said, “The area of southern Lebanon is under Israeli occupation, where its military is searching the area and occupying some of the houses.”

The CNEWA-Pontifical Mission has been at the forefront of providing humanitarian aid to Lebanese in the south and Beirut.

Israel has continued to attack towns and villages in southern Lebanon despite the ceasefire.



Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz in the Musandam Peninsula on April 27. Photo: OSV News/Reuters

Stella Maris urges prayer for seafarers trapped in Hormuz blockade

(OSV NEWS): As the US and Iran face off over the Strait of Hormuz continues, Catholic maritime ministry leaders are calling for prayer and support for the thousands of souls trapped at sea amid the war.

“We have organised prayers of intercession, and many of our chaplains are trying to reach out to see how we can advocate,” said Sister Joanna Okerke, the US national director of Stella Maris.

An estimated 20,000 seafarers are currently stranded in the Persian Gulf, according to the International Maritime Organisation [IMO], the United Nations agency responsible for maritime safety, security and environmental compliance.

IMO secretary-general, Arsenio Dominguez, shared that figure in an interview with *CNN* on 16 April, describing the seafarers’ situation as “terrible.”

Dominguez said, “It is the mental health, it’s the fatigue that these innocent seafarers are actually going through.” He said he was “very grateful to the countries in the region, because they continue to provide the essential supplies, even with the challenges that exist.”

But, he warned, “the longer that this conflict goes on,” the more the situation at sea “becomes a crisis.”

Iran officially closed the Strait of Hormuz on March 4, days after the US and Israel launched joint February 28 attacks that killed several of Iran’s top officials, including supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

US Defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, said at an April 24 press briefing that the stoppage would remain in place “for as long as it takes.”

At least seven seafarers were killed in March as ships came under attack, with Dominguez issuing a March 6 statement calling the blockade “unacceptable and unsustainable.”

At the outset of the war, Bishop Luis Quinteiro Fiuza, interim president of the Apostleship of the Sea, wrote to the Stella

Maris bishop promoters worldwide, with the text summarized in an April 17 Facebook post by Stella Maris in the United Kingdom.

The post quoted from the bishop’s letter, saying, “We invite the entire Apostleship of the Sea family to pray, for those in high-risk areas, for their safety and protection from harm, and for the families who wait at home with concern.”

Sister Joanna, a member of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus order said, “This issue is affecting many people,” adding, “Many are still at sea, and their families are worried. This is disintegrating families.”

Father Paul Makar, a Ukrainian Catholic priest from the Archeparchy of Philadelphia who is in training for Stella Maris ministry, said that it is essential to provide the stranded sailors “with at least some sort of relief.”

The priest—a former naval officer and licensed merchant marine engineer—said the crews caught up in the blockade are grappling with an array of stressors compounded by the conflict.

With more than 80 per cent of the world’s goods shipped by sea, Father Makar explained the work entails long months on the open water and demanding port loading schedules.

Crews sometimes work “24 to 36 hours straight just to meet deadlines for loading and offloading,” he said. Other anxieties he named were storms, piracy, safety issues and “ship abandonment.”

Now, said Father Makar, seafarers impacted by the blockade are “worried about where they’re going to get their next meal from, and whether they’re going to have air conditioning and enough fuel. There are some ships out there that have not been able to receive fuel.” He urged prayer for all affected.

“It is a very dangerous profession, and has been since the dawn of time,” said Father Makar, adding that Stella Maris and other maritime ministries “always reach out” to let seafarers know “they’re not alone.”

Call for release Filipino seafarers held by Iran



The Strait of Hormuz. Photo: NASA/Public domain/Wikimedia

MANILA (UCAN): A global seafarers' group has joined the Philippine government and rights organisations in demanding the release of 15 Filipino seafarers held by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps amid the Middle East conflict.

Edwin dela Cruz, a lawyer and president of the International Seafarers Action Centre [ISAC], said the global community, including the United States, should intervene for the release of the sailors.

"We are united in our call for the immediate repatriation of the affected seafarers, and for President [Ferdinand] Marcos to enforce the agreement for their safe return to the Philippines," dela Cruz said on April 24.

He appealed to the Iranian forces not to harm the 15 Filipino sailors aboard two container ships intercepted as they attempted to exit the Strait of Hormuz.

"Our second appeal is for the shipping company owners to temporarily stop their passage [through] the Strait of Hormuz. The lives of our Filipino seafarers are far more important than money," dela Cruz said.

ISAC offers vital support services, legal assistance, counselling, and educational programmes aimed at empowering maritime workers.

Dela Cruz also appealed to US president, Donald Trump, to remove the naval blockade against Iran, saying that many innocent civilians have been caught in crossfire due to the ongoing tension in the region.

Philippine Department of Migrant Workers secretary, Hans Leo Cacdac, said the ships with 15 Filipino sailors onboard are currently in the vicinity of the Iranian coastline.

"We have been assured that all 15 seafarers are safe and unharmed. We remain in close coordination with their families,

the manning agency, and ship owners, and continue to provide updates and support," Cacdac said in a statement on April 23.

Cacdac added that the Philippine government is taking all necessary steps to ensure the protection and welfare of the affected seafarers, while maintaining close coordination with relevant stakeholders.

Malacañang Palace, the official residence of the Philippine president, reported that a total of 1,161 Filipino seafarers had safely exited the Persian Gulf amid the conflict in the region.

They began their safe departure between the first week of April to April 18 aboard 22 vessels and five cruise ships, the palace said.

Meanwhile, 412 seafarers who still remain in the Persian Gulf are safe and have sufficient supplies, according to their employers, Palace spokesperson, Claire Castro, said on April 23.

Seafarers from the Philippines comprise over 25 per cent of the estimated 1.5 million sea-based workers worldwide.

Remittance from overseas Filipino workers, including seafarers, is vital for the nation's economy.

In February, Filipino overseas workers sent home US\$3.02 billion in remittances, about 2.6 per cent higher than the amount in February 2025, according to the Philippine central bank.

Philippine Department of Migrant Workers secretary, Hans Leo Cacdac, said the ships with 15 Filipino sailors onboard are currently in the vicinity of the Iranian coastline



The remains of those killed in the April 19 military operation in Barangay Salamanca, Toboso, Negros Occidental. Photo: LicasNews/by Avon Ang/Altermidya

Nothing just about conflicts in the Philippines and the Middle East

MANILA (LICAS NEWS): Human rights lawyer Antonio "Tony" La Viña argued that a deadly military operation on April 19 in the Philippines and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East do not meet the standards of a "just war," describing them as unjust and devastating for civilians.

In reflections published on April 23, La Viña posed the question: "When, if ever, is war just?" He concluded that neither conflict meets the conditions of just war, failing tests of last resort, civilian protection, and proportionality.

He added, "These are unjust wars, and the price is being paid in human lives."

La Viña cited the escalation after the February 28 US and Israeli strikes on Iran, noting that "thousands have been killed in the weeks since" and "millions more have been displaced from their homes and communities."

He argued modern warfare rarely fulfills the strict requirements to justify armed conflict, echoing the view that war is "not a solution but a catastrophe with no winners."

He applied the same standard to the April 19 military operation in Salamanca village, Toboso town in Negros Occidental province, where 19 people were killed in what authorities called an encounter with the New People's Army.

The operation, lasting nearly 12 hours, displaced at least 653 residents, many of whom sought refuge in schools.

Among the dead was RJ Nichole Ledesma, a community journalist documenting the

plight of farmers and marginalised groups.

Independent reports say Ledesma was not at the clash site but was killed in a separate community during pursuit operations.

La Viña also cited the killing of a University of the Philippines Diliman student leader who was in the area to learn firsthand about militarisation and land dispossession.

"Both were doing what a free and just society must protect," he said.

He rejected the view that the operation was legitimate counterinsurgency, writing, "Their killings were not accidents. They were consequences of systematic red-tagging and unchecked state violence."

He added, "Militarisation has not brought peace to Negros, or to Mindanao. It has deepened poverty and silenced dissent. That is not counterinsurgency. It is terror. And it must be named as such, clearly and without qualification."

In a separate reflection, Bishop Gerardo Alminaza of San Carlos stressed the incident should not be reduced to numbers: "19 lives were lost in a single armed encounter, human beings, not statistics."

He said the conflict "did not begin with guns" but with "landlessness in a land of vast haciendas" and "entrenched poverty in communities surrounded by wealth."

Warning of a recurring pattern, the bishop said, "violence answers violence," displacing communities and deepening grievances. "This is not

victory. This is collective failure."

La Viña echoed this view, noting that military force does not resolve root causes. "Violence only feeds the next cycle of grief and retaliation."

In a pastoral letter, Bishop Alminaza called for a shift away from armed responses toward a "just peace."

He said, "For generations, societies have tried to justify violence under certain conditions. Today, the scale and persistence of suffering demand a more urgent question: what would it mean to build a just peace?"

Bishop Alminaza said, "A just peace is not merely the absence of gunfire. It is the presence of justice in land, labour, and livelihood, participation in governance, truth-telling and accountability, the healing of historical wounds, and the restoration of human dignity."

La Viña argued these conflicts are unjust, their cost measured in human lives—journalists, students, farmers, and families whose identities must not be reduced to statistics.

"Moral clarity demands that we say what these wars are. They are failures of leadership and failures of imagination. Peace is not weakness. It is the only path that has ever worked," he added.

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Jakarta's cathedral marks 125th anniversary

JAKARTA (LICAS NEWS): The Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption in Jakarta, Indonesia, marked its 125th anniversary on April 21, with Church leaders emphasising that its significance lies not in the building itself, but in the faithful who gather within it.

"Of course, the congratulations are not addressed to the building itself, but to all the faithful who regularly come here, especially the parishioners of the Cathedral Parish," said Ignatius Cardinal Suharyo of Jakarta during a Thanksgiving Mass.

"With deep gratitude, I would like to extend my congratulations on the 125th anniversary of the cathedral church," the cardinal said.

The celebration brought together clergy and parishioners from across the Archdiocese of Jakarta, marking over a century of the cathedral's service as the seat of the local Church.

Cardinal Suharyo described the cathedral as more than a historical landmark, highlighting its ongoing role in guiding the



Church's mission.

"As a cathedral—known as the mother church—may its presence serve as a model of how the Church lives and serves both its people and society," the cardinal said. "May it continue to seek creative ways of ministry in changing times, so that the Church remains meaningful and relevant for both the community and its faithful."

He also acknowledged those

who sustain parish life across ministries.

"My thanks go to everyone involved in the ministry of this

The Cathedral of Our Lady of the Assumption, Jakarta, Indonesia.

Photo: Peter Monthienvichienchai/
LiCAS News

church: those in leadership, in small communities, at the parish level, in regions, and in various ministries," he said. "May all these efforts continue to be a blessing for many of our brothers and sisters and bring glory and praise to God."

The Neo-Gothic cathedral, designed by Jesuit architect Father Antonius Dijkmans and built by Marius Hulswit, traces its origins to 1899, when its cornerstone was laid. It was inaugurated and blessed on 21 April 1901, during a pontifical Mass

accompanied by the Saint Cecilia Choir.

Following the anniversary Mass, the celebration continued with the traditional cutting of the *tumpang*—a cultural expression of thanksgiving—and the opening of a photography exhibition titled "Sustainable Preservation Efforts".

The exhibition features images of the cathedral in its current condition and aims to promote awareness of its preservation. The site was designated a National Cultural Heritage site in 2018 by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture.

An architectural seminar, "Heritage Walk and Talk: Jakarta Cathedral," is scheduled for May 1, with organisers presenting the cathedral as a case study in heritage conservation.

Filipino migrants 'accidental missionaries' abroad, cardinal says

(RVA NEWS): Filipino migrants working across the globe are emerging as "accidental missionaries," quietly renewing Catholic communities abroad, according to Pablo Virgilio Cardinal David, bishop of Kalookan and former President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

Reflecting on the country's vast diaspora, he described overseas Filipinos as "smugglers of the faith," carrying religious devotion into homes, workplaces, and parishes far beyond the Philippines.

One of the world's largest Catholic nations, the Philippines has an estimated 10 to 11 million citizens living overseas. While migration is often framed in terms of economic sacrifice and family separation, Cardinal David said it is also giving rise to an unintended missionary movement, as Filipino workers bring their faith into everyday life abroad.

Most Filipino migrant workers are concentrated in Asia and the Middle East, particularly in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Hong Kong, and Singapore, where they are employed in sectors ranging from healthcare and construction to domestic work.

Smaller but significant communities are also found in North America and Europe, especially in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain, where many have settled



A Couples for Christ group in Qatar gathers for a community event. Photo: RVA News/Mark Tablac CFC Qatar

as professionals and long-term residents.

In these settings, Cardinal David said, Filipino migrants often find themselves entrusted with the most fragile dimensions of human life, as caregivers to the elderly, companions to the sick, and support to families, creating spaces where faith takes root.

Many migrants, he noted, deepen their religious practice while abroad, turning to prayer and community as sources of stability amid the challenges of displacement and separation from loved ones.

He also pointed to the devotional practices Filipino migrants bring with them, including reverence for the Black Nazarene, the Santo Niño, the Divine Mercy, and Marian devotions such as Our Mother of Perpetual Help, often kept in homes and shared within communities abroad.

Cardinal David added that migrants also draw inspira-

tion from Filipino saints such as St. Lorenzo Ruiz and St. Pedro Calungsod, whose lives of witness continue to resonate with those who leave home in search of work and opportunity.

"They leave as workers," David said, "but many become witnesses of the faith."

In many parts of the world, Filipino migrants have become a steady presence in parish life, serving in ministries and sustaining communities through their participation and devotion.

"They do not set out to evangelise, but in their fidelity, they become missionaries," he said.

For Cardinal David, the experience of Filipino migrants points to a deeper reality: that even in the midst of displacement and hardship, faith continues to find new ground.

What begins as a search for livelihood, he said, often becomes a witness that reaches far beyond borders.

Latin Patriarchate slams settler attacks on Church land in West Bank

JERUSALEM (ASIANEWS): The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has expressed its "full rejection" of Israeli settler "encroachments" on its land in the Tayasir/Hamam al-Maleh areas of the Jordan Valley in the West Bank.

In a press release on April 24, it reported a "field meeting" with Israeli civil and military authorities to discuss the serious incident and to submit an "official and documented complaint," including details of the attack. According to pictures circulating online, the attack included the destruction of a school attended by 70 children.

The patriarchate noted that "protecting Church endowment properties is a red line," underscoring its commitment to safeguarding their sacred character and ecclesial identity, as well as the Palestinian population affected.

Following this complaint, the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem stated that Israeli "authorities began the necessary actions, including pursuing those responsible and seizing heavy machin-

ery used for destruction and damage at the site."

The Church in the Holy Land demanded reparation for the damage caused, the prevention of future attacks, and a guarantee of protection of its properties. Israeli authorities have reportedly carried out "the immediate removal of the encroachments."

The incident came amid increasing settler violence in the West Bank since the start of the war with Iran. Recently, extremists have started targeting schools. In Umm al-Khair, south of Hebron, a main road was cordoned off with barbed wire to prevent children from accessing the local school. For five days, the children protested peacefully for their right to education.

Meanwhile, the Israeli government is trying to mend increasingly tense relations between the Jewish state and the Christian community in the Holy Land.

Relations soured after Christian leaders were prevented from celebrating services in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

Mining companies exploiting Indigenous peoples

Father Shay Cullen

The Philippines is blessed with great mineral wealth. It has an abundance of nickel, copper, gold, cobalt, chromite, iron ore, manganese, zinc, lead, mercury, and even rare earth elements. It also has vast resources of renewable energy—wind, solar, hydro, geothermal, and biomass—yet it depends on burning coal, the most hazardous fuel in the world. It has a highly educated, culturally diverse, talented, and intelligent population, and yet there is wealth disparity.

Out of the country's population of 117 million gifted, kind, and generous Filipinos, approximately 14 million families [51 per cent] considered themselves poor in 2025. Of this figure, approximately 5.5 to 6 million families said they experienced involuntary hunger—that is, near starvation—at least once in the previous three months. Within that group, 1.2 million families [about 4.5 per cent] said they experienced severe hunger, which means they go hungry often or always.

This great nation has one of the highest levels of wealth inequality because out of 117 million Filipinos, there are 12 to 15 US dollar billionaires and over 12,000 US dollar millionaires, according to 2025–2026 reports. Less than one percent of the population owns and controls roughly 45 to 50 per cent of the nation's wealth.

There are historical, political, and educational reasons for this. For one, families control the political system. Transparency



The mining site of Ipilan Nickel Corporation [INC] in Brooke's Point, Palawan, where nickel ore is extracted. The site highlights the ongoing environmental concerns in the province, which recently approved a 50-year mining moratorium to protect its ecosystems. Photo: LiCAS News/Mark Saludes

International's recently released Corruption Perceptions Index [CPI], which measures the level of corruption, sadly shows that the Philippines dropped to 120th place out of 182 countries.

Rich families perpetuate their dynastic rule through patronage, promoting a false perception of providing security, vote buying, media manipulation, false narratives of their generosity, populism, and blatant propaganda. By monopolising power at all levels, they can manipulate the electoral system in their favour, since accountability is weak.

Most investigations of corruption end without anyone being punished. These dynastic politicians make laws to protect them-

Poverty grows due to the serious lack of industrialisation and dependence on remittances from 2.7 million OFWs

selves, increase their wealth, and negate opposition.

Poverty and corruption spread downward to all sectors of society. Poverty grows due to the serious lack of industrialisation and dependence on remittances from 2.7 million overseas Filipino workers [OFWs], mostly in Asia, including the Middle East.

In 2024, OFWs sent home 262.20 billion pesos in remittances. But the economy still struggles with rising oil prices—among the highest in Asia—driven by oil companies and enabled by compliant officials. Poverty persists because of low-paying jobs and a weak manufacturing sector.

This is the heart of the problem: a lack of well-paid jobs creates poverty and hunger, and many in the middle class are living in debt. The ruling elite justify poverty, claiming “life is as good as it's going to get,” leading to low expectations, weak political awareness, and little or no activism to change the situation. This fosters low self-esteem and a “bahala na” [whatever happens, happens] attitude, allowing corruption to persist and poverty to endure.

Underperforming in education

This is also reflected in the Philippines' educational standards. In the latest Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA], Filipino students ranked near the bottom globally and behind their Southeast Asian counterparts in student proficiency.

In reading, the Philippines ranked seventh out of eight participating Southeast Asian countries, outperforming only Cambodia. While Filipinos perform relatively well in English, they rank lowest in core subjects such as maths, science, and reading compared to neighbouring countries.

There is what experts call a “proficiency collapse.” There is a sharp decline in proficiency as students move from primary school to high school. Approximately 30.5 per cent of learners in the third grade are considered proficient. By 10th grade, proficiency drops drastically to just 1.36 per cent. By the end of senior high school, proficiency rates fall to near zero [0.4 per cent].

Some attribute this to poor teacher training and a lack of encouragement for students to meet high standards. This has had a damaging effect on the quality of education, resulting in fewer quality jobs and a lower standard of living. The apparent tolerance of the government and society for the spread of images of violence and child sexual abuse on social media is also affecting students.

These materials contribute to a culture of tolerated immoral-

ity, emotional distress, and rising teenage pregnancies, all of which distract from education. The United Nations Children's Fund reported that 3,343 girls aged 10 to 14 gave birth in 2023. It is estimated that over 500 Filipino girls aged 15 to 19 become mothers every day. Many are likely to remain in poverty, along with their children.

The export of semiconductors accounts for 50 per cent of the Philippines' total export revenue. However, mining industries exporting unprocessed minerals to China contribute less than a per cent to the economy. In 2024, such exports were worth roughly US\$7.37 billion.

Little or none of this revenue benefits the Filipinos from whose ancestral lands the minerals were extracted. This is an injustice that remains largely unaddressed. Serious conflicts have broken out among Lumad communities, the Indigenous peoples of Mindanao, including the B'laan, Subanen, and Manobo, over the Tampakan Project operated by Sagittarius Mines in South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Davao del Sur.

These conflicts have lasted for decades, displacing as many as 5,000 people, with anti-mining advocates reportedly killed.

In the Caraga region, particularly in Surigao del Sur and Agusan del Norte, mining companies such as Marcventures Mining and Development Corp., Taganito Mining Corp., and Platinum Group Metals Corp. reportedly operate with impunity. These firms have allegedly encroached on ancestral lands and damaged the environment, with nearly 84 per cent of nickel tenements overlapping with ancestral domains and biodiversity hotspots.

These issues have contributed to violence and the country's highest recorded number of killings of Indigenous and anti-mining activists. As many as 298 land defenders have been killed, a third of them Indigenous. Indigenous peoples make up about 15 per cent [17 million] of the population and live closely with nature.

Philippine mining corporations present themselves in the media as responsible and environmentally conscious while allegedly concealing their environmental impact. There are also reports that security forces have been used to pressure Indigenous peoples to sign consent agreements for mining operations and to leave their ancestral lands.

Two new Lao priests ordained

THAKHEK (FIDES): Two new priests were ordained for the small Catholic Church in Laos which has 53,000 faithful throughout the country. Bishop Jean-Marie Vianney Prida Inthirath, the apostolic vicar of Savannakhet, ordained Father Peter Gnantina Phiakeo and Father Philip Nouy Kamhou of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer on April 22 at St. Louis Church in Thakhek.

The celebration, marked by dances, songs, hymns, and prayers, brought together more than 1,200 Catholic faithful from across Laos and neighbouring countries such as Thailand and the Philippines. This extraordinary event for the local Church, which has a total of 20 priests and no foreign missionaries due

to government restrictions, was a moment of great significance.

Bishop Anthony Adoun Hongsaphong, apostolic vicar of Vientiane, who was present at the event, said, “It was a festive and joyful celebration, marked by the presence of many young people, along with more than 40 priests and numerous religious sisters: all wanted to join in praising the Lord and praying for the two new priests, an immense gift that God bestows upon the Laotian Church.”

Bishop Hongsaphong said, “The large and diverse community of the faithful present participated with vibrant faith and profound spiritual intensity, praising God and placing the future of the Church in Laos in his hands.”

Notice Board



Work dignity means respect

Being an overseas worker, I value my work with dignity because no job is superior. As a housemaid in Hong Kong, I see it as decent work with fair wages, safety, and respect for workers' rights. By doing my job well, following house rules, listening, and maintaining a good relationship, I show respect to my employer. — Abby Amilano



Dignity of work means both sides have equal rights and should not be treated badly. I show respect by staying positive, listening when I'm wrong, hearing others, and staying professional even when tasks are hard. Be kind and honest, acknowledge every situation, and remember that respect is a practice, not a label. I also live by the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and love your work regardless of salary. — Cristine Bustos

To me, dignity of work means every job has inherent value, contributing to society and allowing personal agency. Work is not just pay but a way to find purpose, build character, and serve others. Respect for work and employer goes beyond rules; it's a mindset and daily habit. Show respect by being professional, improving the employer's image, and embracing responsibility. In difficult times, respect reduces fear and enables pursuing a better future. — Joemard Gomez



Dignity in work means every task has value, with or without a formal title. It's about respecting all employees and performing duties seriously and reliably. Work supports families and gives meaning to effort. I show respect by valuing my time—being prepared, focused, and meeting organizational expectations. Respect also shows in clear communication, understanding roles, and healthy workplace relationships. — Lorie Ann Labolabo

The dignity of work means work is part of our humanity. It enables families to thrive, talents to grow, and contributions to something larger. No job is "low" if done with honesty and care. I show respect through consistency, integrity, respect, loyalty, and gratitude. Dignity in work builds my own dignity and self-respect. — Marissa Viudez



Work dignity matters to me. It fuels growth, not just finances—shaping character. Domestic helper abroad is a privilege; not easy, but noble and meaningful I'm proud of. I've learned, met people, and built memories. It supports my family's living everyday. I respect my job by diligent work and following instructions. — Jhonna May Tasin

Voices across the sea for the Labour Day

Across the miles,
we carry home in our hearts,
From bustling cities to the quietest shores.
On Labour Day honoured are —
The New Heros opening future doors.

With hands that build
and hearts that care,
We brave the cold and the stinging salt,
Offering every silent, whispered prayer,
To lift our families without a fault.

Though oceans wide keep us apart today,
Our courage shines, a steady, guiding light.

To every OFW, I proudly say:
Happy Labour Day! Stay brave and bright.
For every sacrifice and tear
you've shed,
A better world for those we
love lies ahead.

— Gloria Ruiz



Strength of us

Beyond the contracts and the morning light,
Beyond the rush to make the future bright,
There is a quiet grace in how we stand,
Building a world with a steady, shared hand.

You are the friend who hears what isn't said,
The calm that settles when the doubt is spread;
The one who knows my shadows and my pride,
And chooses still to walk right by my side.

But when the vision calls and work begins,
We trade the laughter for the grit it wins.
As partners, we are fire, steel, and stone,
Refusing to let either stand alone.

Through every uphill climb and heavy gate,
We share the burden and we share the fate;
For trust is more than words upon a page—
It is the anchor and the turning stage.

Two lives, two roles, one single, honest beat,
Making the journey and the triumph sweet.
I count my wealth not by the things
we've won,
But by the soul I walk with 'til we're
done.

© Frieda Norma Dela Cruz



Even my spirit is thriving and parched within

Be authentic. Be genuine.
Be the fountain where all smiles derive.

Be green, be peaceful.
Be red, be love.

Be sophisticated, be colorful, be life itself.
Be the mirror of souls who cherish peace and joy.

Be the verdant forest and the crimson woods
Be that beautiful spot people wish to visit.

Be the beautiful valley that graces the eyes of many.
Be the smile of your own city
and the Queen of your kingdom.

Be the pearl of your nation
and the gem of the world.

Show your grace to satisfy their sight.
Unfold your wonders to unwind their spirits.

Remain true to yourself,
so that the world may never forget
the beauty you have shared.

Be healed, and be a healer,
for your presence is the comfort everyone needs
and their presence is yours.

Be spirited
Be positive and be a light.
Even though your spirit is thriving and
parched within,
you still shine brightly.

Helen A. Sarita





YOUR DAILY MASS GUIDE

MAY 3 – FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER. Mass of the Sunday, *Gloria, Creed, Easter preface* (white).

Readings: Acts 6:1-7;
1 Peter 2:4-9;
John 14:1-12.

MAY 4 – MONDAY: FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER. Mass of the day, Easter preface (white).

Readings:
Acts 14:5-18;
John 14:21-26.

MAY 5 – TUESDAY: FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER. Mass of the day, Easter preface (white).

Readings:
Acts 14:19-28;
John 14:27-31a.

MAY 6 – WEDNESDAY: FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER. Mass of the day, Easter preface (white).

Readings: Acts 15:1-6;
John 15:1-8.

MAY 7 – THURSDAY: FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER. Mass of the day, Easter preface (white).

Acts 15: 7-21;
John 15:9-11.

MAY 8 – FRIDAY: FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER. Mass of the day, Easter preface (white).

Readings:
Acts 15:22-31;
John 15:12-17.

MAY 9 – OUR LADY, QUEEN OF CHINA. Mass of the memorial, Easter preface (white).

Readings:
Acts 16:1-10;
John 15:18-21.



Apostleship of Prayer

Themes for
May 2026

THAT EVERYONE MIGHT HAVE FOOD

Let us pray that everyone, from large producers to small consumers, be committed to avoid wasting food, and to ensure that everyone has access to quality food.

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The passage in today's Gospel is taken from the first of three farewell speeches pronounced by Jesus at the Last Supper. Jesus today speaks of the dwelling places that have been prepared for us. The entrance to this dwelling place is Jesus himself. Thomas the Apostle asks Jesus for the way to reach him. When we accept the person of Christ and his teaching—we have accepted the way. Jesus is the Way to the Father.

Tolle et lege! "Take up and read!" St. Jerome teaches that to be ignorant of the scriptures is to be ignorant of Christ. One chapter each day would take us less than a month to finish reading one Gospel prayerfully. Responding to the Gospels in faith

Please show us the Father

ultimately leads to that heavenly dwelling that has been prepared for us.

"There are many places in my Father's House", says Jesus. But this House of the Father is not a place where the Lord will take us after our death, nor is it a faraway place. This house is not paradise but the Christian community - the Church. In his Church, Jesus has prepared a place for everyone who agrees to follow Jesus' "way".

His Church is where he lives today - his Father's house. He prom-

ises to take us to his Church so that we can be together with him, where he is. The house has many places which refer to the many services and tasks that need to be carried out there. The "many places" are nothing but the "various ministries" of the Church and the many gifts received from God.

Many people in their lives echo Philip's request: "Show us the Father." Since God in himself is invisible and unseen, it is not unusual to hear similar questions: "What is God like?" The truth of the matter is

Acts 6:1-7;
Readings: 1 Peter 2:4-9;
John 14:1-12

that for us Christians, this question has already been answered. God is like Jesus. To know the person and teaching of Jesus is to know God.

When Christians act Christ-like, they also reveal to us the face of the Father in different ways. The friend by our side in times of distress, the person who stays by our bedside in times of illness, and the one who forgives and does not condemn us when we make a grave mistake - they all reveal the merciful face of the Father. In the scriptures and our personal experience, there are countless ways through which we are being shown the Father.

● **Father Josekutty Mathew CMF**



Ang talata sa Ebanghelyo ng araw na ito ay nanggaling sa una sa tatlong pahayag-paalam na binibigkas ni Hesus sa Huling Hapunan. Ngayon, nagsasalita si Hesus tungkol sa mga tirahan na inihanda para sa atin. Ang pasukan sa tirahang ito ay si Hesus mismo. Humingi si Tomas, ang alagad ng Diyos, ng daan upang marating siya. Kapag tinanggap natin ang katauhan ni Kristo at ang kanyang aral—tinanggap din natin ang daan. Si Hesus ang Daan tungo sa Ama.

Tolle et lege! "Kunin at basahin!" Itinuturo ni St. Jerome na ang maging mangmang sa mga kasulatan ay maging mangmang din sa Kristo. Isang kabanata bawat araw ay magdadala sa atin na matapos ang pagbabasa ng isang Ebanghelyo nang may pagninilay sa loob ng hindi hihigit

Ipakita mo sa amin ang Ama

sa isang buwan. Ang tugon sa mga Ebanghelyo sa pananampalataya ay sa huli magdadala sa atin sa makalangit na tirahan na inihanda para sa atin.

"Maraming tirahan sa Bahay ng aking Ama," sabi ni Hesus. Ngunit ang Bahay ng Ama ay hindi isang lugar na dadalhin tayo ng Panginoon pagkatapos ng ating kamatayan, ni hindi ito isang malayong lugar. Ang bahay na ito ay hindi paraiso kundi ang komunidad ng mga Kristiyano—ang Simbahan. Sa kanyang Simbahan, inihanda ni Hesus ang isang tirahan para sa bawat isa na sumunod sa "daan" ni Hesus.

Ang kanyang Simbahan ay kung saan siya nananahan

ngayon—ang bahay ng kanyang Ama. Nangako siyang dadalhin tayo sa kanyang Simbahan upang magsama-sama tayo sa kanya, kung nasaan siya. Ang bahay ay may maraming tirahan na tumutukoy sa iba't ibang serbisyo at gawain na kailangang isagawa doon. Ang "maraming tirahan" ay walang iba kundi ang "iba't ibang ministeryo" ng Simbahan at ang marami pang kaloob na natanggap mula sa Diyos.

Maraming tao sa kanilang mga buhay ang humihingi ng kahalintulad na hiling ni Felipe: "Ipakita mo sa amin ang Ama." Dahil ang Diyos sa sarili siya ay hindi nakikita at, hindi nakapagtataka na marinig ang

mga katulad na tanong: "Ano ang Diyos?" Ang katotohanan ay para sa atin bilang mga Kristiyano, ang tanong na ito ay nasagot na. Ang Diyos ay katulad ni Hesus. Ang makilala ang tao at aral ni Hesus ay makikilala ang Diyos.

Kapag kumikilos ang mga Kristiyano nang tulad ni Kristo, naiihayag din nila sa atin ang mukha ng Ama sa iba't ibang paraan. Ang kaibigan sa ating tabi sa panahon ng pagsubok, ang taong nananatili sa tabi natin sa oras ng karamdaman, at ang taong nagpapatawad at hindi naghahatol kapag tayo ay nakagawa ng malaking pagkakamali—sila lahat ay nagpapahayag ng mahabaging mukha ng Ama. Sa mga kasulatan at sa ating personal na karanasan, maraming paraan kung paanong ipinapakita sa atin ang Ama.

● **Claretian Publications**

What is the point of a pilgrimage? The concept has deep roots in Scripture and remains a living practice today. Pilgrimage gathers believers to deepen devotion, seek grace, atone for sins, or experience a transformation of faith through travel, sacrifice, and prayer.

Pilgrimage appears in many faith traditions, reflecting humanity's search for meaning. In Christianity, it embodies a journey toward God, not only a physical trip but a spiritual movement that reframes ordinary life as a pilgrimage of faith. The Old and New Testaments provide theological foundations for this practice, linking journeying with conversion, trust, and reliance on divine guidance.

A pivotal biblical model is the Exodus, where Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt through the desert toward the Promised Land. This journey illustrates how faith, trial, and perseverance shape spiritual renewal. In the New Testament, pilgrimage shifts emphasis from travel to living one's life in a way that continually leads toward the eternal. The Infancy Narratives recount the Holy Family's annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover (Luke 2:41-42), with Jesus at the centre of temple discourse, signaling a life oriented toward God from a young age.

Jesus' public ministry unfolds as a continual journey toward Jerusalem. His death on the cross redefines pilgrimage: redemption becomes the traveler's goal, and earthly life becomes a path toward heaven. The apostles preach that Christ's sacrifice opens the way to eternal life, turning suffering and trials into offerings of praise on the path to salvation.

In Christian tradition, pilgrimage is closely tied to Christ and the saints. Saints are honored in churches and shrines that preserve their bodies and tombs, inviting faithful to imitate their virtues. After

What is the point of a pilgrimage?



Land faced political shifts, new routes opened in the West, and Rome emerged as a major destination, continuing to attract pilgrims to this day. The Camino de Santiago in Spain is another enduring example, where St. James the Great's relics draw multitudes, with a network of pilgrim hostels along the way.

Over the centuries, additional pilgrimage sites gained prominence. Sanctuaries proliferated worldwide to commemorate apparitions, miracles, or the lives of saints. Thousands of destinations exist, but several stand out: Rome, the Holy Land, and Santiago de Compostela. Marian shrines are especially significant: Loreto in Italy houses the Holy House of Nazareth; Lourdes in France is famed for Marian apparitions and healing experiences; Fatima in Portugal relates to Mary's appearances to three shepherd children.

In the Americas, notable sites include Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico and the Shrine of Aparecida in Brazil. National shrines exist as well, such as the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Wisconsin—the only approved Marian apparition site in the United States.

The religious purpose of pilgrimage distinguishes it from ordinary travel. It is not primarily about art, history, or scenery; it requires restraint and deliberate focus on prayer, silence, and spiritual growth. A true pilgrim seeks not luxury but a changed heart.

● **Deborah Castellano Lubov OSV News (Abridged by SE)**



Filipe Neri Ferrão is seen with Fr. Zeferino D'Souza, parish priest of Stella Maris Church. Photo: RVA News/DCSCM, Goa

Stella Maris Chapel now 175th parish of Archdiocese of Goa and Daman

MIRAMAR (RVA NEWS): The Stella Maris Chapel in Miramar was elevated to the status of a parish church on April 15, 2026, marking the creation of the 175th parish in the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman, southwest India.

The solemn ceremony was presided over by Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão, the archbishop of Goa and Daman and president of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, with the participation of clergy, dignitaries, and parishioners. The liturgical celebration included special prayers and rites formally recognizing the chapel's new status.

This milestone highlights the steady growth of the local Church and holds deep significance for the Catholic community in Miramar and across Goa.

Situated in Miramar, a coastal locality of Panaji, the chapel has functioned under St. Inez Parish since 1989. The process for its elevation began more than 15 years ago and is the fruit of sustained efforts by the faithful and successive chaplains.

The Archdiocese of Goa and Daman will now have 175 parishes with this addition.

The Stella Maris community comprises about 327 families and is located near the confluence of the Mandovi River and the Arabian Sea. Known for its Marian devotion, the community entrusts itself to Mary under the title "Star of the Sea."

Father Zeferino D'Souza, chaplain of Stella Maris, described it as a moment of grace and gratitude for the entire community.

The elevation of the Stella Maris Chapel marks not only an institutional development but also a spiritual milestone, as the faithful of Miramar prepare to begin a new chapter in their parish life.

Central Asian bishops elect new leadership and reaffirm support for Pope Leo XIV

TASHKENT (FIDES): The Catholic bishops of Central Asia, who gathered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from April 15 to 19 for the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Central Asian Bishops' Conference, reaffirmed their support for Pope Leo XIV in "his peace-making efforts and pastoral ministry, exercised towards the flock entrusted to him and towards all those who suffer from wars and injustice."

At the beginning of their assembly, they thus expressed their solidarity with the Bishop of Rome following the verbal attacks by US President Donald Trump. According to a statement released at the end of the meeting, the participants offered "fervent prayers to the Lord for the gift of peace for all humanity."

The meeting was attended

by the bishops and ordinaries of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia, and Azerbaijan.

At the start of the sessions, Archbishop George Panamthundil, the apostolic nuncio to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, gave his remarks. The apostolic nuncio to Uzbekistan and Russia, Archbishop Giovanni D'Aniello, sent a message to the participants of the assembly.

On April 17, elections for the governing bodies of the conference were held. Giorgio Cardinal Marengo was elected president of the conference, Bishop José Luis Mumbiela Sierra as vice president, and Bishop Yevgeniy Zinkovskiy as secretary general.

During the plenary sessions, the bishops, in a spirit of fraternal communion, exchanged

experiences of pastoral ministry, discussed the current challenges faced by the local Churches, and "shared the joys and hopes of the faithful, supporting one another in unity and responsibility for the mission entrusted to them."

On April 18 in Tashkent, the bishops visited the Centre of Islamic Civilisation in Uzbekistan. This visit became a significant sign of openness, mutual respect, and a commitment to fostering interreligious dialogue.

In their concluding statement, "the bishops called "upon all the faithful to pray earnestly for peace for the peoples suffering from unjust wars, entrusting them to the special intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, and imploring the gift of a just and lasting peace for all."

Nobody asked him to leave

by John Singarayar SVD

Once lay inside a coffin and listened to my friends describe my life as if I had already left it.

This was not a nightmare. It was a retreat exercise during my novitiate—deliberately arranged, entirely voluntary. Each of us took a turn. We climbed in, closed our eyes, and listened while our brothers spoke about us in the past tense. What we had given. What we had withheld. What kind of space we had made for others, or failed to make.

When my turn came, I heard things that were kind, things that were accurate in ways I wished they weren't, and one observation that I have never quite shaken loose—not because it was cruel, but because it was simply, plainly true.

One companion stayed in the coffin the entire afternoon. Nobody asked him to leave.

I have thought about that image many times since. A young man choosing to stay inside his own death, not from despair but from some deep need to let the truth settle before he climbed back out into ordinary life. There was something in that I recognised and something I found quietly frightening.

We are not as comfortable with honesty as we think

Good Friday is supposed to be the most honest day in the Chris-



OSV News photo/Bob Roller

tian calendar. A man was executed. Friends scattered. Everything he said apparently ended in silence and failure. No softening, no recovery, not yet. Just the cross and what it cost.

But we have had two thousand years to tidy it up, and we have used them well. The cross has become jewellery. The story has become ritual. The brutality—the political manoeuvring, the crowd psychology, the particular cowardice of people who knew better and stayed quiet—has been smoothed into something we can observe from a comfortable distance without it asking us very much at all.

That bothers me more the older I get.

Because the forces that killed Jesus were not unusual. They were ordinary. Pilate was not a monster; he was a pragmatist protecting his position. The religious authorities were not villains twirling cloaks; they were institution men afraid of disruption. The crowd was not uniquely cruel; crowds rarely are. They were people doing what people do when fear and tribalism take over—following the loudest voice, rationalising what they could not stop, and looking away from what they did not want to see.

We do all of this. Regularly. Often without noticing.

What the coffin and the cross share

The retreat exercise worked because it removed the usual escape routes. You could not change the subject, check your phone, or reframe the story more favourably. You just had to lie there and listen to an account of your life that you had not written and could not edit.

The cross does something structurally similar. It holds up a moment that cannot be redecorated. A person who spent his life moving toward the excluded and the wounded ended up killed for it—not by extraordinary evil but by the completely ordinary machinery of self-interest, institutional anxiety, and crowd silence. That is not a comfortable story. It

is not meant to be.

What unsettles me most about Good Friday is not the suffering—terrible as it was—but the recognisability of everything surrounding it. I know the voice that says this situation is more complicated than it looks. I know the instinct to protect what we have built rather than risk it for something true. I know what it feels like to stay quiet in a room where someone needed me to speak.

I suspect most people do.

Living while there is still time to change

My companion in the coffin was working something out that afternoon. I think he had heard something about himself that needed more than a few minutes to absorb—not a condemnation, but an invitation to become more fully what he was already capable of being.

That is what Good Friday offers, underneath all the solemnity. Not guilt as a destination, but honesty as a doorway.

The question is not whether we have failed—most of us carry the knowledge of our failures quietly and constantly. The question is whether we are willing to climb back out of the coffin and actually do something differently. Whether the story of Jesus' life and death lands on us as history or as something with a claim on how we spend tomorrow.

The cross does not offer easy comfort. But it does offer company—the company of someone who looked at the full cost of love and chose it anyway, not in a single heroic moment but across years of small, consistent, quietly radical choices.

Most of our lives will be decided in those smaller moments. In what we say or don't say. In whom we stay near when staying is inconvenient. In whether we let difficult truths settle or climb out too quickly into the noise.

My friend stayed in that coffin all afternoon.

I have always thought he understood something the rest of us were still working up the courage to face.

Pope Leo in Africa: The magisterium of peace, justice, and fraternity

Antonio Spadaro

SJ, [edited and condensed from original UCAN article]

Pope Leo XIV's first apostolic journey—11 days, four countries, an entire continent as horizon—was far more than a pastoral pilgrimage. From Algiers to Malabo, Leo XIV placed Africa at the heart of a sweeping, courageous discourse on peace, justice, and the world's future. He confronted neo-colonialism, extractivism, tyranny, and corruption, insisting the global peripheries have wisdom to teach.

In Algeria, Cameroon, Angola, and Equatorial Guinea, he challenged power, praised Africa's resilience, and called for solidarity, forgiveness, and a peace rooted in justice. Leo's message: Africa is not a victim, but a teacher for a fractured world.

From his arrival in Algiers on April 13 to his departure from Malabo on April 23, Leo XIV crafted a coherent vision with Africa as protagonist—the vantage point from which to judge the world's ills. Peace, war, tyranny, corruption, neo-colonialism, extractivism, exclusion, and fundamentalism were each addressed with candour and coherence, revealing a pastoral project of sweeping ambition.

Algeria: The Pilgrim of Peace in the Land of Augustine

Pope Leo chose Africa—and specifically Algeria, home of St. Augustine—as the stage for his first journey. In Algiers, he declared himself a “pilgrim of peace,” emphasising the primacy of encounter over strategy. He confronted global power imbalances, referencing Algeria's colonial history, and called for a new chapter rooted in dignity and solidarity. Citing Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, he warned that poorly oriented globalisation breeds poverty and inequality. The message: international politics must heed the world's peripheries—and Africa has vital lessons for all.

At the Maqam Echahid monument to Algeria's martyrs, the pope reflected on freedom and peace. God desires peace for every nation—not merely the absence of conflict, but peace rooted in justice and dignity. True peace, he stressed, is possible only through forgiveness. The future belongs to people of peace; justice will outlast injustice, and violence will never have the last word. These words spoke to Algeria and to all places

riven by conflict.

Visiting the Grand Mosque of Algiers, Pope Leo highlighted the importance of interreligious dialogue, linking the search for God to the dignity of all people, and prayed for universal peace and justice.

Cameroon: Disarmed peace and the denunciation of warlords

In Yaoundé the journey's political heart, Pope Leo offered a manifesto on peace and good governance. Cameroon, “Africa in miniature”, is a treasure of cultures, a promise of fraternity and a foundation for lasting peace. He denounced violence, displacement, and hopelessness in the country's troubled regions. Peace, he argued, must be “disarmed” and “disarming not built on fear or weapons”, creating trust and empathy.

Pope Leo repeated his cry: enough wars and exiles. Quoting Augustine, he said power is for service, not domination, and urged leaders to break corruption's chains and pursue real human development.

The pope praised women as architects of peace and said their voices must be fully recognised in decision-making.

In Bamenda, he met a community ravaged by the Anglophone crisis and condemned the warlords: a moment destroys, but a lifetime is needed to rebuild. Billions are found for weapons, he said, but not for healing or education.

He described the perverse spiral of extractivism—plundering Africa's resources to fund weapons, fuelling endless destabilisation. “The world is destroyed by a handful of dominators and held together by a multitude of brothers and sisters in solidarity.”

He praised Christian-Muslim collaboration in Bamenda as a model, warning against those who twist religion for violence or power.

At the Catholic University of Central Africa, Pope Leo challenged youth and scholars to pioneer a new humanism in the digital age—aware of both technology's promise and its risks for society and the environment.

Angola: Joy and hope as political virtues

In Luanda, Pope Leo introduced joy and hope as “political” virtues. Africa, he said, is a “reserve of joy and hope” because its young and poor still dream and long to rise again.



Photo: OSV News/Matteo Parnaschi/Vatican Media

The wisdom of a people cannot be extinguished by any ideology, and the longing for the infinite that dwells in the human heart is a principle of social transformation more profound than any political or cultural programme.

The pope denounced the “extractive logic” causing suffering and catastrophe, imposed as the only model of development.

He repeated Pope St. Paul VI's critique of a materialistic civilisation that claims to be the future.

Most radical was his analysis of tyranny: despots render souls passive, sowing sadness, fear and submission. Only joy and solidarity, he argued, can liberate people from political alienation.

He quoted Pope Francis again on how power sows hopelessness and distrust, disguised as defence of values. Authentic joy, the fruit of solidarity, is a force for liberation.

In Saurimo, he urged the Church to remain rooted in faith, contributing to justice and peace in Africa and beyond.

Equatorial Guinea: The City of God and the City of Peace

In Malabo, the final stop, Pope Leo reflected on Augustine's two cities: the earthly, rooted in pride and power; the City of God, founded on love of neighbour.

Addressing Equatorial Guinea, building its new capital Ciudad de la Paz, he challenged all to consider which city they serve.

Here, the pope launched his sharpest denunciations of contemporary international politics. He named exclusion as “the new face of social injustice”, highlighting the gap between the wealthy and the majority who lack essentials despite access to technology.

He condemned speculation on raw materials, neglect of the environment, and disregard for the dignity of labour. Armed conflicts, he said, are driven by the colonisation of oil and minerals, ignoring law and self-determination.

The pope also noted that new technologies are often developed for military ends, not the common good. He warned that without a

course correction toward assuming political responsibility and respecting international institutions and agreements, the destiny of humanity risks being tragically compromised.

“God does not want this. His holy Name must never be invoked to justify actions of death,” the pope said.

At Bata Stadium, Pope Leo met with young people and families, celebrating a living, incarnated faith and the vibrant heritage of their cultures. He told the young the future is theirs, but it requires effort, discipline, and meaningful work.

He encouraged vocations to priesthood and consecrated life.

Addressing families, the pope insisted that welcoming life requires love, commitment, and care, as the family remains the ground of human and Christian growth.

He quoted Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, on marriage as a living sculpture of God, and called the faithful to resist stereotypes that diminish family value. Charity lived in the home, he said, can transform society so that all are respected and none forgotten.

The final public act was Mass in Malabo on April 23.

Pope Leo chose the episode of the Ethiopian eunuch's encounter with the deacon Philip [Acts 8:26–40] as the lens through which to read the entire African journey. The figure of the eunuch—rich yet enslaved, intelligent yet not fully free, his energies consumed by a power that controls and dominates him—became in the pope's hands a parable of Africa itself: a continent of immense resources whose wealth serves others, whose labour benefits foreign masters.

Yet the eunuch, liberated by the gospel, becomes a protagonist of his own story—as Leo hoped for Africa.

The pope linked the manna in Exodus and the Eucharist as the bread of a new covenant. Against “individualistic sadness”, he warned, a closed heart leaves

no room for the poor or God's joy.

He offered condolences for the late vicar general of Malabo, and encouraged the Church to continue the disciples' mission, making the gospel “good bread for all.”

The message to international politics: A synthesis

Pope Leo's African journey was a powerful message to global politics. Though the trip was marked by public dispute with the US president, Donald Trump, the pope clarified that his speeches were prepared well in advance and were not polemics.

Every word the pontiff spoke was read as a response to the White House. On the flight to Luanda, the pope noted that the speeches had been prepared weeks in advance and that engaging in polemics with Trump “is not at all in my interest.”

Papal texts are, in fact, the product of a long editorial process that precedes departure. And yet, when the pope denounces “despots and tyrants” who render souls “passive and enslaved to power,” or the “colonization of oil and mineral deposits with no regard for international law,” these words cross every border.

Catholic social teaching speaks universally but resonates everywhere. Pope Leo avoids naming governments, using the refinement of Vatican diplomacy. No country is excluded from his challenge.

A message built on five pillars

- Repudiating war and calling for peace rooted in justice and forgiveness;
- Denouncing neo-colonialism and extractivism;
- Critiquing tyranny and corruption as systems, not just personal vices;
- Defending international law and multilateralism;
- And affirming Africa as a subject, not an object, of world history—a bearer of wisdom and joy.

Marking the anniversary of Pope Francis's death, Pope Leo renewed his predecessor's legacy, grounding it in Augustinian tradition and applying it boldly to the crises of 2026: AI in warfare, resource speculation, climate, digital exclusion, and global polarisation.

His African journey marks the first great act of a pontificate determined to speak to the world.