Beat: News

Pope Leo XIV Highlights Urban Exclusion During Visit to Madrid's CEDIA 24 Hours

Pope Visits CEDIA Center in Madrid

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USPA NEWS - During his first pastoral act in Spain, Pope Leo XIV underscored the political urgency of addressing homelessness, migration challenges, and rising urban inequality, using his visit to the CEDIA 24 Hours Center in Madrid as a call for stronger public policies and institutional commitment to protect society's most vulnerable.

Pope Leo XIV placed social exclusion at the center of the public debate today during his visit to the CEDIA 24 Hours Emergency and Comprehensive Care Center, a Cáritas Madrid facility serving people experiencing homelessness. In a gesture with clear political resonance, the Pontiff chose this site as the first pastoral act of his trip, underscoring the urgency of addressing the social fractures affecting major European cities. His tour of the center, accompanied by staff, volunteers, and service users, highlighted the human dimension of a phenomenon intensified by the housing crisis, labor precarity, and the irregular administrative status of thousands of migrants.

Cardinal José Cobo opened the event with remarks that reached beyond the ecclesial sphere. He described Madrid as a "city of doors" and said the Pope was entering it "through a door small in appearance but immense in mercy," pointing to the periphery as the place from which the true condition of a society can be understood. His intervention, rich in political nuance, reaffirmed the priority of the most vulnerable as a criterion for assessing Europe's democratic and social health—an idea increasingly present in discussions on urban exclusion and social cohesion policies.

The testimonies shared during the gathering added a human dimension to the statistics. Niurka, a Cuban mother welcomed at the Santa Bárbara Home, recounted how she arrived alone and pregnant, finding in the Church "an unexpected family." Khadry, a Senegalese migrant, offered the Pope a replica of his residence card as a symbol of "years of waiting and hope," highlighting the complexity of migration regularization processes. Alicia, a volunteer, presented a pair of sandals as a sign of service, while Alba, a social educator, introduced the Tree of Hope, crafted by individuals undergoing addiction treatment and transformed into the emblem of the event.

The Pope received the tree as a gesture of recognition toward those striving to rebuild their lives from a place of fragility—a moment interpreted by analysts as a call for institutions not to relegate social exclusion to a secondary position. In his closing remarks, the Pontiff invited attendees to "lift their gaze" without losing contact with "the mud of the neighborhood," a metaphor pointing directly to the need for public policies capable of addressing the housing crisis, inequality, and precarity affecting broad urban sectors.

The day concluded with a blessing in the parish church, leaving a message that transcended the religious sphere: human dignity cannot depend on economic cycles or administrative status. Pope Leo XIV's visit to CEDIA 24 Hours thus stood as a political and moral reminder that exclusion is not a marginal phenomenon but a structural challenge confronting governments, institutions, and society at large.

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