Beat: News

Pope Leo XIV Confronts Madrid Youth and Calls for a Bold Generational Awakening

Youth Vigil with Pope in Madrid

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USPA NEWS - In a massive vigil that transformed Madrid's Plaza de Lima into a space of faith, silence and civic engagement, Pope Leo XIV spoke with thousands of young people about their spiritual and social concerns, addressing issues from precarious living conditions and the housing crisis to the Christian mission in the digital age.

Pope Leo XIV gathered tens of thousands of young people tonight in Madrid's Plaza de Lima for a massive vigil that combined music, prayer and dialogue, transforming one of the busiest areas of the capital into a space of spiritual —and also civic— reflection. Conceived as a "festival of faith," the event took on a distinctly political undertone as it addressed, head?on, the concerns, vulnerabilities and challenges facing younger generations in Spain and across Europe.

The vigil, shaped by a strong Marian dimension, placed Our Lady of Almudena at the heart of the gathering. Her processional entrance, accompanied by thousands of young people praying the rosary and meditating on the luminous mysteries, created an atmosphere of contemplation that contrasted with the social tensions, youth precariousness and economic uncertainty dominating public debate. Before the Pope's arrival, Christian artists and music groups performed, reinforcing the celebratory tone of the evening.

Cardinal José Cobo welcomed the Pope with a message that went beyond the religious sphere. He urged young people to "lift up their gaze" so as not to remain trapped in despair or immediacy, and highlighted the challenges they face: loneliness, migration, emotional suffering, job insecurity and the rise in adolescent suicides. His words, laden with political resonance, appealed to the responsibility of institutions to accompany a generation living amid technological acceleration, social polarization and economic fragility —issues at the center of current debates on youth precarity and social fragmentation.

After the welcome, the long?awaited dialogue between the Pope and the young people began, becoming the emotional and political core of the night. The first questions focused on the Holy Father's spiritual influences during his youth. In addition to Saint Augustine, Leo XIV mentioned Saint John Chrysostom —"his catecheses have especially impressed me, uniting love for truth with uprightness of life." Drawing from this, he encouraged the young people: "Never be afraid to consider a vocation to the priesthood, to religious life, or to other forms of service in the Church." He also cited two Spanish saints: the Augustinian Saint Thomas of Villanova —"his burning charity strengthened me in moments of trial"— and Saint Toribio of Mogrovejo —"a model of dedication to the people, especially the poorest, in the name of Christ."

Asked about his years of mission in Peru, the Pope recalled "the testimony of faith of the people, marked by many difficulties yet full of hope." It was, he said, "the encounter with the wounds and joys of the people" that made him grow in his own faith. "I was being transformed by the Gospel, experiencing how the Lord's word brings peace where there is conflict and becomes, for all, a source of reconciliation and justice."

A second set of questions revolved around how to discern God's voice amid so many influences, and how to accompany those discovering the beauty of faith. The Pope offered three keys. First, silence: "To know the voice of God, silence can help us above all, because it fosters attention and recollection." In silence, he said, "we understand that ideologies pass away, while truth remains." Second, trust: "Be certain that God knows your voice well; He listens to you and will answer you." Prayer, he added, is a free voice "because it does not speak to give explanations," and when we become prayer, "the Lord responds with His Word." Third, humility: "Remember that none of us was born a teacher; before the Lord, we are always disciples." This humility, he said, should lead to sharing one's spiritual journey with coherence of life.

He invited the young people to act "as shepherds, educators and friends." If they pray with love, he said, others will discover the value of prayer; if they burn with faith, they will transmit its living fire. "Seek in your hearts this fire of God's love, for there is the presence of Jesus —a presence that remains even in our moments of falling, because Jesus does not abandon us."

The final block of questions focused on how young people can live as committed Christians in society, and on the concrete mission the Pope entrusts to them. Leo XIV encouraged newly married couples and those preparing for marriage: “Do not be afraid of marriage or of forming families.” Responding to the broader concerns, he said: “The disciples of Jesus are always contemporary, but never prisoners of the passing age. We are free in Christ.”

He reminded them that the meaning of history culminates in communion with God, and that they are called “to give new direction to society, becoming protagonists of change beginning with your daily relationships.” Seeing their enthusiasm, he said he was hopeful about their ability to bear witness to Christ “even in the digital world.” In the face of indifference, conformity, war and falsehood, he entrusted them with being “the spark of a new humanity.”

“The mission I entrust to you is precisely this: be human. Yes, be human —men and women of flesh and bone. Not appearances, but trustworthy faces. People who hunger for justice as for daily bread. People who desire an honest and upright life.” He urged them to look to the apostles and the first Christians as models for confronting the material and spiritual poverty of our time.

After the dialogue, the Holy Father signed the Youth Cross, crafted for the occasion and measuring approximately four meters high by 2.5 meters wide, placed on stage beside the image of Our Lady of Almudena.

As the Pope withdrew to vest for Eucharistic Adoration, Fito Robles, vocalist of Siloé, and Father Jaime Salmoreno performed a song. Around 9:50 p.m., Adoration began with the prayer of the Holy Father. Plaza de Lima fell silent as Eucharistic hymns preceded the reading of the Gospel passage of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. During the meditation before the Blessed Sacrament, the group Hakuna performed You, Only King. After the intercessions, the Pope imparted the blessing to those present and to all following the event through the media. He then greeted young people, artists and organizers, leaving in everyone the shared memory of the profound silence that had enveloped Madrid during the blessing.

The evening concluded with a fireworks display set to the official hymn of the Papal Visit.

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