Beat: Politics

POPE LEO XIV COULD OUTSHINE ROCK STARS TURNS STADE DE FRANCE INTO A CATHEDRAL

800 000 YOUNG VOICES, ONE MOVE

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USPA NEWS - Eighteen years after Benedict XVI's 2008 official state visit, Pope Leo XIV returned the papacy to France for four days that moved from Paris to Lourdes and finally to Metz. This special on-the-ground series revisits the journey one day at a time, beginning with its final chapter and moving backwards: not only the official speeches and ceremonies, but the faces, silences, encounters and acts of care that gave the visit its human meaning. Each episode is built from field reporting, direct observation, official texts and local voices. From the dignity of sick and disabled pilgrims in Lourdes to the Pope's appeal for peace and reconciliation in Metz, this is a chronicle of a visit that sought to speak to France as it is: diverse, vulnerable, divided at times, but still capable of fraternity.
This special serial report follows each stage of the visit: the French Presidency, at Elysee Palace to meet his counterpart President Macron and UNESCO, Notre-Dame, the extraordinary youth gathering at the Stade de France, the pilgrimage to Lourdes and the final encounters in Metz.

POPE LEO XIV IN FRANCE , FOUR-DAY SERIES
Over four historic days, from Paris and Saint-Denis to Lourdes and Metz, Pope Leo XIV's apostolic journey through France brought together diplomacy, faith, youth, culture and an urgent call for peace. This special serial report follows each stage of the visit: the French Presidency, at Elysee Palace to meet his counterpart President Macron and UNESCO, Notre-Dame, the extraordinary youth gathering at the Stade de France, the pilgrimage to Lourdes and the final encounters in Metz.

Through field reporting, eyewitness accounts and the Pope's most significant messages, this series explores a visit that placed human dignity, solidarity, education, technological responsibility and service to the vulnerable at the centre of public debate. From official halls of power to vast popular gatherings, Pope Leo XIV's first visit to France revealed both the country's spiritual memory and the energy of a new generation. By our handyjournalist, Field reports from Paris, Saint-Denis, Lourdes and Metz.

LARGELY UNKNOWN TO THE WIDER PUBLIC BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL, THE AMERICAN POPE WITH FRENCH ROOTS DISCOVERED THE SPIRITUAL POWER OF FRANCE
FROM DAY1, POPE LEONXIV INSPIRED FAITH POWER, ETHICS & THE PUBLIC GOOD
The Day One (D1) began at the French Presidency, (Elysee Palace), where Pope Leo XIV was received by President Emmanuel Macron and Brigitte Macron. Their discussions touched on climate change, artificial intelligence, Ukraine, the Middle East and multilateralism, but the Pope also placed ethical questions at the centre of the exchange. He warned against a "paradise of machines" in which moral discernment would be sacrificed to technical performance, and defended the principle that the right to life is the foundation of all other rights. Macron, for his part, defended French "laïcité" (secularism) as the framework that guarantees both the freedom to believe and the freedom not to believe.

This was not a confrontation between religion and the Republic. It was a serious encounter between two languages of public responsibility. The Pope did not seek to govern France from the Elysee, nor did he erase the differences between the Holy See and a secular state. He insisted instead that ethical reflection must remain present in public life: technology must serve humanity, laws must protect dignity, and political decisions must not lose sight of the vulnerable. At UNESCO later that afternoon, he extended this message internationally, arguing that education should help human beings "be more," rather than simply "have more."

ON THE COMMON MISSION OF SECULAR FRATERNITY & FAITH : This was not a confrontation between religion and the Republic. It was a serious encounter between two languages of public responsibility. The Pope did not seek to govern France from the Elysee, nor did he erase the differences between the Holy See and a secular state. He insisted instead that ethical reflection must

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During his official address in the Élysee courtyard, President Macron responded to the Pope's messages on solidarity, secularism (laïcité), and global challenges.

THE PAPAL OFFICE AT NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS : FROM ASHES TO HOPE
At Notre-Dame de Paris, the Pope presided over the first papal office held beneath the cathedral’s restored vaults since the 2019 fire. The setting made his message unavoidable: a monument wounded by flames but restored through immense collective effort. Before priests, religious figures and seminarians, he invoked the cathedral as a sign that crises do not have the final word.

“These vaults bear the scars of fire, but tonight they bear witness to the victory of life over ashes.”

“Do not be afraid of crises or of the poverty of your numbers.”

The Pope LeonXIV also asked religious leaders to leave comfort behind and reach the “peripheries,” where loneliness and despair remain unheard. The gathering brought together President Macron and Brigitte Macron, Culture Minister Rachida Dati, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, King Philippe and Queen Mathilde of Belgium, Prince Albert II of Monaco, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, UNESCO Director-General Khaled El-Enany and major donors to the reconstruction. The protocol was prestigious, but the Pope’s words redirected attention away from status and toward service.

THE STADE DE FRANCE: A ROCK-STAR MOMENT FOR FAITH
Then came Saint-Denis the emotional climax of the day. Eighty thousand young people turned the Stade de France into a vast, luminous cathedral. The artistic direction, entrusted to creative teams associated with Puy du Fou, unfolded as a sequence of monumental tableaux: the courage of Saint Blandine and the martyrs of Lyon; the builders of Gothic cathedrals; the charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, Frédéric Ozanam, Jeanne Jugan and the Little Sisters of the Poor. Horses, Roman costumes, monumental moving structures, light projections resembling stained glass and a procession of the Sainte Tunique of Argenteuil created an experience closer to an epic concert than a conventional religious gathering.
The music moved between a full symphonic orchestra, 2,500 young choristers, traditional liturgical music, baroque arrangements and contemporary worship songs. Couronnée d’étoiles, the Magnificat, Christus Vincit, the World Youth Day anthem Emmanuel and modern praise songs lifted the entire stadium.

At the end, thousands of candles and mobile-phone lights turned the arena into a sea of stars, before a carefully choreographed pyrotechnic finale. It was spectacular without becoming empty spectacle: a visual history of Catholicism that made charity, sacrifice, beauty and collective memory accessible to a generation accustomed to stadium-scale emotion.

“YOU ARE THE SAINTS OF FRANCE” THE POPE, CHANTED TO THE YOUNGSTERS
The Pope was visibly moved, and so were many around me. I watched journalists wiping away tears as Leo XIV himself appeared to brush away tears, facing a spectacle that began with the birth of Jesus in a stable, moved through the life and mission of Christ, traced Christianity’s spread across the world and culminated in France’s saints. This was not nostalgia. It was an invitation.

“Do not let anyone tell you that faith belongs to the past.”

“The Church does not need tired spectators; it needs your joy, your audacity and your hands ready to serve.”

THANK GOD THANK YOU....."YOU ARE THE SAINTS OF FRANCE ”
This final phrase is the key to his message. He did not describe holiness as an impossible summit reserved for exceptional figures. He placed it within reach of young people: holiness begins when someone chooses to serve, shares with others, refuses indifference and

turns faith into practical solidarity. The saints portrayed in the show were not presented as statues from another century; they were examples of people who responded to the suffering of their own time. Leo XIV asked today's youth to do the same.

A GENUINELY EMPATHETIC POPE WHO CAME CLOSE TO REACH THE MOST VULNERABLE& UNDERPRIVILEDGED IN FRENCH SUBURBS

The Pope did not remain confined to the central stage. He travelled around the entire circumference of the Stade de France, giving spectators in every section the chance to see him closely. Near the arena, young people pressed toward the barriers, greeted him, reached out and, for a brief moment, touched him before he returned to his vehicle. A planned stop in Bondy was removed from the program for reasons that were not publicly clarified, but the Saint-Denis evening retained a special symbolic charge: in a department often described only through its difficulties, tens of thousands of young people gathered peacefully, joyfully and without incident.

FRANCE REMEMBERED POPE LEON'S SPIRITUAL POWER

The climax of Day 1 was not the fireworks, the celebrities or the spectacular scale of the production. It was the sight of a Pope one who arrived relatively unknown to much of the country allowing himself to be moved by France's spiritual memory and by its young people. The rock-star energy of the evening mattered because it was transformed into something deeper: not celebrity worship, but shared faith, joy and a promise to serve.

France has given the world saints, thinkers, builders, caregivers and defenders of the poor. The Stade de France did not pretend that this history belongs only to the past. It placed it in the hands of 80,000 young people and asked them what they will do with it now. Pope Leo XIV's answer was direct: do not be spectators in a wounded world. Become the generation that brings charity, courage and fraternity back into public life.

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