

On 12 and 13 May, 470,000 Pilgrims Prayed for Peace and for the New Pope

In the middle of the Holy Year of the Church, the first major pilgrimage of 2025 to Cova da Iria was guided by hope.

Despite occasional rain and the fact that 12 and 13 May coincided with the start of the working week, around 470,000 pilgrims were in Cova da Iria yesterday and today to take part in the celebrations of the International May Pilgrimage.

The call for hope in a world in conflict, and prayers for the pontificate of the new Pope Leo XIV were the two messages that prevailed during these two days marking the 108th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady to the Little Shepherds in Fatima.

“We are living in delicate, tense and complex times... Times when some people might only think of themselves. Times of authoritarianism of various types. Times of fundamentalism that does not promote life. Times when our common home cries out for care. Times in need of openness to others and openness to solidarity, times in need of hope,” said Cardinal Jaime Spengler in his homily at the International Anniversary Mass on the morning of the 13th.

In response to these contemporary challenges, the Archbishop of Porto Alegre, Brazil, urged pilgrims to look with hope to the example of Our Lady, listening attentively to the Word. To the Mother of God, Cardinal Jaime Spengler asked for “the grace of a good heart, capable of hearing the Word, welcoming it and putting it into practice.”

The Brazilian cardinal also spoke of the fear that numbs today's society and presented the confidence in the maternal presence of Our Lady as a source of security to look with hope at fears and difficulties.

Last night, Dom Jaime Spengler called for world peace and closeness among peoples, for harmony and forgiveness.

“We need the wine of harmony, of understanding between peoples, the wine of forgiveness, of peace, the wine of understanding, the wine of closeness, the wine of the courage to look into each other's eyes and say: You are my brother, you are my sister,’’ said the Archbishop of Porto Alegre in his homily during the Celebration of the Word on 12 May.

At the beginning of yesterday evening's celebrations, a new cross was inaugurated in the presbytery of the Chapel of the Apparitions. Made of bronze cast by the sculptor Rogério Timóteo, the piece shows a more visible and expressive representation of the cross with Christ crucified, and it stands as a sign of the present Jubilee Year.

Consecration of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV to the Blessed Virgin

During this pilgrimage on 12 and 13 May in Fatima, the newly elected Pope Leo XIV was evoked on several occasions. The most significant reference was Bishop José Ornelas's act of consecration of the pontificate of Pope Leo XIV to the Blessed Virgin, performed in the presence of the Portuguese episcopate before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima at the end of Mass on the 13th.

“On this 108th anniversary of your apparition to the little shepherds here in Cova da Iria, we, the bishops of Portugal and this multitude of pilgrims, are at your feet to consecrate to you the ministry of the current Successor of Peter and Bishop of Rome, the Holy Father Leo XIV,” the prelate said at the beginning of his introduction to the jubilee prayer of consecration. He then asked the Mother of God for tenderness, discernment, courage and the ability to ‘continue to launch the urgent cry for peace to the world’, as the newly elected Pope did in his first address in Rome after his election.

The introduction to the prayer then emphasised the significance of the Successor of Peter in the Message of Fatima, evoking the visits of the last four Popes, particularly Pope Francis's latest and his call for an inclusive Church.

A chalice offered by Pope Francis was used during the Eucharistic Celebration of the International Anniversary Pilgrimage in May. Offered by His Holiness on his pilgrimage to the shrine on 13 May 2017, the piece is distinguished by its deeply symbolic iconographic narrative.

On the 13th of May, the International Anniversary Mass was concelebrated by 27 bishops, including two cardinals – Cardinal António Marto, Bishop Emeritus of Leiria-Fátima, and Cardinal Fortunato Frezza, Canon of St. Peter's Basilica – and 282 priests. Fourteen deacons were also present at the altar.

During the celebrations of the 12th and 13th May, the new sound system of the Shrine's Prayer Area was inaugurated, a project that improved the acoustic coverage and clarity of sound transmission and created redundancy in the system, which now offers pilgrims high quality throughout the entire celebration area.



A diverse and "extraordinary" assembly

At the end of the celebration, the president of the Pilgrimage, Monsignor Jaime Spengler, thanked the bishop of Leiria-Fatima for the invitation to preside over the 12th and 13t of May in Fatima, and praised the celebrations and the "extraordinary people" who gathered in Cova da Iria. On Monday afternoon, the Archbishop of Porto Alegre had praised the mystery, charm, reverence and silence experienced in the Shrine.

Moments earlier, José Ornelas thanked the Brazilian cardinal for his presence and highlighted the diversity of the assembly present in Cova da Iria, "united by the same faith".

"Here, we demonstrate that it is possible to live together. Having a common Father enables us to become brothers and sisters more easily, without excluding anyone. Therefore, we will then leave this place with renewed purpose in our hearts, because

this world needs signs of hope, faith, solidarity, kindness and compassion. Mary is the mother of us all!” said the Bishop of Leiria-Fátima, who asked for prayers and a round of applause for Pope Leo XIV.

During the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, before Mgr. José Ornelas' final words, Father Francisco Pereira, the Shrine's chaplain, addressed the sick in his usual message. Looking with hope at those who suffer, he recalled the perseverance Pope Francis showed in his final days and assured them of the presence of Our Lady and her Son amid human suffering.

At the end of today's celebration, the Rector of the Shrine said the celebrations were “very positive”, adding that it had been an experience of faith and of the Church that he believed had left the pilgrims “with their hearts full”.

'The prayer area was full yesterday and today. Yesterday it was slightly fuller than today. Given that they were weekdays, a Monday and a Tuesday, this is very significant. This pilgrimage was marked by the death of Pope Francis and the election of Pope Leo XIV, a fact that accompanied the pilgrimage from beginning to end,” said Father Carlos Cabecinhas, speaking to journalists in Fatima.

The Shrine services registered 164 groups of pilgrims for the 12th of May and 191 groups for 13th of May, coming from five continents.

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