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Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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Pope Leo XIV's first Christmas – Gaza as a symbol of global injustice

Pope Leo XIV, the first American to lead the Catholic Church, was elected in May 2025 following the death of Pope Francis. He held his first Christmas Mass in St Peter's Basilica on 25 December.

During the homily and the traditional Urbi et Orbi message (to the city and the world) from the central loggia of the basilica, he made an unusually direct reference to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

This marked a shift in tone from his typically diplomatic and restrained style, in which he rarely introduces explicit political references into solemn liturgical moments.

In his Urbi et Orbi Christmas message on 25 December, Pope Leo XIV openly highlighted Gaza as an example of civilian suffering.

He spoke of people left without homes or livelihoods and called for an end to the logic of war, which places the greatest burden on those who have no control over the decisions of the warring parties.

Gaza was not only mentioned in the message but also presented as a concrete sign that the humanitarian crisis continues even when the guns fall silent, as people remain without shelter, security, and the basic conditions for a normal life.

Gaza as the most concrete image of suffering

According to damage estimates by the UN and other international institutions, about 292,000 housing units in Gaza were destroyed or damaged during the conflict that began with a Hamas attack on Israeli communities in October 2023, followed by intense Israeli bombing and ground operations.

Almost two million people, out of a total population of about 2.3 million in Gaza, have been displaced and are living in temporary shelters.

Recent heavy rains have further worsened the situation, increasing the risk of hypothermia and disease in the tented settlements, where aid continues to fall short despite the ceasefire.

> Pope called for "justice, peace and stability for Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Syria"

The Pope elaborated on this image in Urbi et Orbi, saying that “in becoming man, Jesus took upon himself our fragility, identifying with each one of us: with those who have nothing left and have lost everything, like the inhabitants of Gaza.”

This identification with suffering was not the only one. The Pope linked Gaza to other crises, such as the famine in Yemen, migrants crossing the Mediterranean or the American continent, unemployed youth, and prisoners in inhumane conditions.

However, Gaza was the most concrete example, especially in the context of the Middle East, where he called for "justice, peace and stability for Lebanon, Palestine, Israel and Syria." Quoting a biblical verse, he reminded listeners that "the effect of righteousness will be peace."

Not merely a humanitarian appeal

Unlike most media, which interpreted the Pope's message as a routine call for peace or a continuation of Pope Francis' approach, a different perspective emerges here.

Leo XIV, born in Chicago and with many years of experience in Peru as an Augustinian, brings the perspective of someone who has lived among the poor in the countries of the Global South but also as an American aware of the limitations of the diplomatic language of superpowers.

His directness about Gaza is no accident.

During autumn 2025, he had already expressed concern for Palestinian civilians several times, including in a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the Vatican, where they agreed on emergency aid to Gaza and a two-state solution.

> This is not merely a humanitarian appeal but Pope's broader vision of peace as "shared responsibility", calling for dialogue instead of the monologue of power

What makes this message significant is its timing and context. The October 2025 ceasefire brought a fragile peace, but no reconstruction. Aid is slow to arrive due to restrictions on crossings, and winter rains are turning tent settlements into mud.

The Pope did not directly accuse either side, but his emphasis on the "fragility of defenceless populations" and the "open wounds" left by wars clearly highlights the asymmetry of civilian suffering.

This is not merely a humanitarian appeal. Underlying it is the Pope's broader vision of peace as "shared responsibility", calling for dialogue instead of the monologue of power.

A voice of conscience

Forecasts for this Pope's future approach to the Middle East differ from the usual commentary that sees him as a continuation of Francis' line.

Leo XIV will probably not become a vocal critic of Israel like some Latin American prelates (bishops, archbishops, and cardinals), but his American background and experience in the Vatican as head of the Dicastery for Bishops (the body that appoints bishops worldwide) give him a unique position.

The Vatican under Leo XIV is likely to intensify humanitarian diplomacy, perhaps through new initiatives with the UN or direct contacts with the parties to the conflict

He understands US politics thoroughly, including relations with Israel under an administration that returned to power in 2025.

His reticence so far suggests that the Vatican under his leadership will continue to offer mediation, but with greater emphasis on practical assistance and quiet diplomacy.

During his visit to Turkey and Lebanon in November, he listened to the concerns of Christian communities in the Middle East, expressing understanding for their sense of powerlessness in the face of great powers.

In a broader geopolitical context, this Christmas message signals that the Vatican will not remain silent on Gaza, even if Western allies prefer to focus on other crises, such as Ukraine.

On the same day, the Pope called for courage in direct negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, demonstrating consistency in his appeals for dialogue.

However, the Vatican could play a more active role as a mediator for Gaza and Palestine, where a two-state solution is once again under discussion following the ceasefire.

Pope Leo XIV has already indicated that the only solution involves a Palestinian state, as he told reporters a month ago.

This message is not simply a seasonal appeal.

It reflects a Pope who, despite his diplomatic style, uses the Christmas moment to remind the world of those forgotten in the negotiations of the great powers.

As Gaza faces winter in tents and reconstruction remains stalled, the Vatican under Leo XIV is likely to intensify humanitarian diplomacy, perhaps through new initiatives with the UN or direct contacts with the parties to the conflict.

For observers of international relations, this is a sign that the Church remains a voice of conscience in conflicts where political will is often lacking.

Peace is not merely the absence of war, but the responsibility to protect the most vulnerable, the Pope said from the Vatican on Christmas Day.