

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

With French, Italian, Spanish and Creole grandparents, Papa Leone XIV is multi-ethnic. He is also multi-national, with three passports: the USA, Peru, where he lived for over 20 years, and since his election in May 2025, the Holy See.

His deeply religious parents were stalwart members of their parish in the working-class community in Dolton, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. They often invited priests to enjoy his mother Mildred Prevost's excellent meals; son Robert's favorite dish was her angel food cake. He was brought up to eat fish on Fridays, which he still does; abstain from meat during Lent; and always clean his plate out of respect. He enjoyed playing "Mass" with his brothers, using Necco wafers as "Holy Communion" — they are still his favorite candy.

So, not surprisingly, he eats everything offered to him (even live baby octopus, as recently presented to him by a Far Eastern delegation), and has spent his life serving the less fortunate, including the hungry. On the 80th anniversary of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Day on October 16th, 2025, he told an audience of world leaders, in essence, to put their money where their mouths are. He delivered a powerful address denouncing hunger as a weapon of war and a collective failure, an "ethical aberration," and a denial of the right to life. He urged global unity to end malnutrition, stressed that food is a right, not a privilege, and that the defeat of hunger is a path to peace.

Three months later, on January 15, he met with Dr. Alvaro Lario, the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), headquartered, like FAO, in Rome. They discussed IFAD's projects in 92 countries to improve agricultural techniques and food security in rural communities, and agreed that agriculture is not just about producing food, but about making sure that farming is a sustainable business for rural people.

Pope Leo's own taste in food is multicultural and reflects his three passports. Chicago's staples — hot dogs loaded with condiments (but not ketchup), Portillo's chocolate cake and deep-dish thin-crust pizza — are his life-long favorites. So, it's no wonder that whenever, over the years, he's gone

THE POPE'S FAVORITE DISHES REFLECT HIS THREE PASSPORTS



Pope Leo XIV at Castel Gandolfo near Rome announcing the opening of a new restaurant there

home (most recently with friends in August 2024), he enjoys a pepperoni pizza at Aurelio's Pizza in Homewood, Illinois. Its original owner, Joe Aurelio, Sr., for decades had a special relationship with the Augustinians who lived nearby; they were served free pizza and drinks once a month. Father Robert's group would sit at the same table every time, which became known as the Tolentine Room, for an early Augustinian, St. Nicholas of Tolentino.

Another Chicago favorite is Berghoff, a German beer house now owned by the same family's fourth generation, in downtown Chicago, where the Prevost family traditionally dined after their annual excursion to see the Christmas window decorations at Marshall Field department store.

Since Pope Leo spent so many years in Peru, its cuisine is his favorite; otherwise, a month after his election, why would he have hired Verónica Sánchez Molina to prepare his daily meals in the Vatican? Of his many favorite Peruvian dishes, *lomo saltado* (stir-fried beef with onions, tomatoes and French fries), *ceviche* (raw fish, marinated with lime and served with red onions and green peppercino), *carne asada* (roast beef), duck with rice, and *cabrito chichlayano* or goat stew are tops. His two favorite restaurants in Chiclayo, both across from the Cathedral, were Las Américas and Trébol.

In Rome, his favorite haunt has always been L'isola della Pizza, not far from the Vatican, where he enjoyed his last meal of Roman artichokes and *spaghetti alla carbonara*, and *pizza alla diavola* before he entered the conclave.

Besides being the first American, the first Peruvian, and the first Augustinian Pope, Leo XIV will be the first Pope to open a restaurant — during the spring of 2026 at the Borgo Laudato Sì, a section of the park surrounding the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo opened to the public by Pope Francis in 2023.

Although still without a name, its menu, chosen by his partners, Chicagoan Art Smith (formerly Oprah Winfrey's personal chef) and Chicago restaurant-entrepreneur Phil Stefani, will include Pope Leo's favorite Chicago-style hot dogs, Peruvian goat dishes, pizza with pepperoni (of course), and "KM 0" ("zero-kilometer," meaning locally-sourced) products. ○

From left: Pope Leo XIV's childhood home, Pope Leo XIV at FAO with Director General Qu Dongyu of China, Trébol's duck and rice dish, and the logo of L'isola della Pizza in Rome, a favorite restaurant of the Pope.

