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## Pope Leo's Food Philosophy, Favorite Dishes and Restaurants

From childhood kitchens to a papal table shaped by mission and memory, and from Chicago to Rome by way of Peru



*Italian Hours*

Lucy Gordan



Logo of "Isola della Pizza", Lucy Gordan

Gestisci consenso

World peace, sustainable agriculture, and food for all are top priorities on Pope Leo XIV's agenda.

On the subject of food, at the Food and Agriculture Organization's 80th anniversary celebration on World Food Day, his powerful address to the many world leaders present denounced the use of hunger as a weapon of war to be 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 fight against hunger and its defeat is a path to peace..

On the personal side, Pope Leo's taste in food reflects his life story: his childhood in Chicago, his more than 20 years as a missionary and bishop in Peru, and his two stints in Rome – from 2001 to 2013 as Prior General of the Order of St. Augustine, and since 2023, when Pope Francis appointed him Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, and created him a Cardinal.



*Pope Leo XIV's childhood home. Photo by Michael Howie, Wikimedia Commons*

His deeply religious parents were stalwart members of their parish in the working-class Chicago suburb of Dolton, Illinois. They often invited priests to enjoy Mildred's delicious meals, and Robert's favorite dish was her angel food cake. Robert Prevost was brought up to eat fish on Fridays, never to eat meat during Lent, and always to clean his plate. Notably, by age six his vocation was already clear: with Mildred's ironing board as the altar, he began "playing priest," serving his older brothers Mass with Necco wafers, still his favorite candy.

Outside the home, Chicago's staples: hot dogs loaded with condiments, but without ketch-up; the restaurant Portillo's chocolate cake; and deep-dish thin-crust pizza are his life-long favorites. So, it's no wonder that whenever he's returned home (most recently in August 2024), he enjoys a pepperoni pizza, now named "poperoni", at "Aurelio's Pizza" in Homewood. Its original owner, Joe Aurelio Sr., for decades served the Augustinians including the Father "Bob", who lived nearby, free pizza and drinks once a month. The group would always sit at the same table, which became known as the "Tolentine Room" for an early Augustinian, Saint Nicholas of Tolentino. Another Prevost Chicago favorite is "Berghoff", a



Seco de Cabrito, Wikimedia Commons

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 now and after he moves into the Papal Apartments? He has 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 pepperoncino), *carne asada* (roast beef), but *seco de cabrito chiclayano* or goat stew is frequently cited as tops. His two favorite restaurants in Chiclayo, where he was bishop, were “*Las Américas*” and “*Trébol*”, both across the square from the cathedral.



Pope Leo XIV and Phil Stefani at the announcement ceremony of Borgo Laudato Si's future restaurant, Courtesy of Borgo Laudato Si

Instead in Rome, his favorite haunt has always been “L’Isola della Pizza”, near the Vatican, where he enjoyed his last meal of Roman artichokes, 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 in the Borgo Laudato Si, a section of the park surrounding the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, which Pope Francis had opened to the public in 2023. Its menu, chosen by Leo’s partners Chicagoan Art Smith (formerly Oprah Winfrey’s personal chef) and Chicago restaurant-entrepreneur Phil Stefani, will include Pope Leo’s Chicago-style hot dogs, Peruvian goat dishes, of course pizza pepperoni, and KM 0 products.

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Italian Hours

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