

Pope Leo's Food Philosophy, Favorite Dishes and Restaurants

by Lucy Gordan | Food, Food blog | 0 comments



Pope Leo XIV and Director-General QU Dongyu at the FAO Photo Credit: Grzegorz Galazka

World peace, sustainable agriculture, and food for all are top priorities on Pope Leo XIV's agenda. Specifically concerning 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 hunger as a weapon of war, 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 over 20 years as a missionary and bishop in Peru; and his three stints in Rome where in 1982 he was ordained: 1981-85 as a student, 2001-13 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 Cardinal.



Pope Leo XIV's childhood home in Dolton, Illinois

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His deeply religious parents were stalwart members of their parish in the working-class Chicago suburb of Dolton, Illinois. They often invited its priests to enjoy Mildred's famously delicious meals; Robert's favorite dish was her angel food cake. Thus, Robert Prevost was brought up to eat fish on Fridays, which he still does, never to eat meat during Lent, and always to clean his plate out of respect. He still eats everything offered to him, even live baby octopus recently presented to him by a Far Eastern delegation, which he told his brothers he could feel trying to escape from his stomach. Not to omit that, at age six, his vocation was already clear when, with Mildred's ironing board as the altar, he started "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 ketchup which is a no-no in the "Windy City"; 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) during his many years abroad, he enjoys a pepperoni pizza, now named "poperoni", at "Aurelio's Pizza" in the suburb of Homewood. Opened in 1977, and today the largest pizzeria in the world with seating for 650 customers, its original owner, Joe Aurelio Sr., during the 1960s and 70s served the Augustinians including seminarian "Bob", who lived in their nearby monastery in Olympia Fields, free pizza and drinks once a month. The group would always sit at the same table, which they dubbed the "Tolentine Room" for an early Augustinian, Saint Nicholas of Tolentino.



The Augustinian Tolentine College where Pope Leo XIV studied from 1969-1974

The source of Pope Leo's favorite pizza is now well-known worldwide. For last summer a team of young Catholics from Chicago attending the Angelus at noon on Sunday in St. Peter's Square orchestrated delivery of one they brought from home to His Holiness. As he was driving through the Square in his Popemobile, the team-leader Madeleine Daley waving "Aurelio Pizza"'s recognizable box caught the Pontiff's eye and so he asked his security detail to stop so he could receive the pizza. Pope Leo gave a thumbs-up and later enjoyed his gift. Another Prevost favorite Chicago destination is still "Berghoff", a German beer house now owned by its namesake's fourth generation, in downtown Chicago where the family traditionally dined after their annual excursion to see the Christmas decorations at Marshall Field Department Store.



Chicago-thin-crust pizza

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



Ceviche

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), arroz con pato (duck with rice, espesado (a thick, green corn-based stew), 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. The waiters recount that he was generous with his blessings, but not his tips.



Arroz con pato



Seco de Cabrito

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.



“L'isola della Pizza” Photo credit: Lucy Gordan

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 Sì, 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.



Pope Leo XIV and Phil Stefani at the announcement of their restaurant Photo credit: Borgo Laudato Sì