Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Basilian Sr. Emanujilla Vishka is pictured in a private audience with Pope Leo XIV on June 30, 2025, at the Vatican. The framed photo sits on Vishka's desk. (Courtesy of Emanujilla Vishka)



by Sr. Emanujila Vishka

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On April 22, 2026, our community — the general leadership team of the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great — visited the Pontifical Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary of Pompeii. After the Holy Mass, all participants received a prayer for the blessed visit of Pope Leo XIV, which is planned for May 8, the anniversary of the day he was elected.

It struck me how many events, both in my life and in the world, have taken place since the day Cardinal Robert Prevost became the Holy Father. Two months after his new vocation, I, who had been a councillor on the previous leadership team, was elected general superior. The events unfolding in the world are turbulent testimonies to a deep restructuring of historical scale on the global level.



Basilian Sr. Emanujila Vishka poses for a photo with a statue of St. Catherine of Siena near the Basilica of San Domenico in Siena, Italy. (Courtesy of Emanujilla Vishka)

And then I realized that exactly one year ago, on April 22, 2025, both my personal journey and the journey of the Basilian Sisters' leadership team with the future Pope

Leo XIV began. That day, we were on pilgrimage to Siena, and in the Basilica of San Domenico we prayed, asking St. Catherine of Siena for the best possible choice of the Holy Father for these times. Knowing her intense spiritual guidance of people from every walk of life — including Pope Gregory XI, who was living in Avignon at that time and whom she energetically and effectively urged to return to Rome — we prayed for her intercession. I remember saying to the sisters that if she was able to help the church in the 14th century, she would do so even more now.

And she did not disappoint us. When, on May 8, 2025, Pope Leo XIV addressed the faithful for the first time after his election, he was, for me, an entirely unexpected gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God, and there was a need to discover who he was and what message he would bring. The surprise came soon.

In his first greeting to the faithful, there were words that will remain with me: "Together, we must look for ways to be a missionary church, a church that builds bridges and encourages dialogue, a church ever open to welcoming, like this square with its open arms, all those who are in need of our charity, our presence, our readiness to dialogue and our love."

At that time, we were already in the process of preparing for the general chapter, and its theme was "building bridges of hope." Therefore, the words of the Holy Father were a confirmation that we were moving in harmony with the Holy Spirit, and they encouraged us to continue our mission.

I met him on the sixth day after his election. On that day, he had an audience for Eastern Catholics, to which my order and I belong. That day, I realized that we are loved and understood.



Participants wave Ukrainian flags as Pope Leo XIV greets them during the Jubilee of the Eastern Churches in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican May 14, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

"You are precious in God's eyes," he said. The Paul VI Audience Hall was electrified with admiration, hope and joy. Those from the 23 *sui iuris* churches in full communion with Rome were praying, singing, even dancing, but also listening and reflecting. The support that we, the Basilian Sisters — who belong to seven Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* — received from Leo was inspiring and healing.

The next step in this journey was the private audience with the Holy Father that we were granted on June 30, 2025. It was significant for us, before our XII General Chapter, to meet Pope Leo XIV in person and to experience his calm and contemplative warmth toward everyone in the hall.



The general leadership team of the Sisters of the Order of St. Basil the Great pose for a photo on April 22, 2025, at the Basilica of San Domenico in Siena, Italy. (Courtesy of Emanujila Vishka)

"Is God my everything?" was a question I meditated on after the audience. Speaking to us, he quoted St. Augustine: "God is everything, your everything. If you are hungry, God is your bread; if you are thirsty, God is your water; if you are in darkness, God is your light that never fades; if you are naked, God is your everlasting garment."

After his speech, each of us was able to come forward and speak with him personally. No one rushed us, and we told him about our chapter and our struggles. We spoke about the war in Ukraine, where 40% of our members live and serve, and we shared how we are trying to build bridges of hope. He listened silently and attentively, and his response to one of us was symbolic: "*Coraggio*!" — meaning "Stay strong!" or "You can do it!" This experience became a precious memory of the Holy Father as a person.

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And then the Basilian Sisters saw it again and again — how bravely he persists in promoting justice, truth, faithfulness and care for the neglected. This care was most vividly felt by our Ukrainian Basilian Sisters. On the sixth day of his pontificate, he had already placed a phone call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. And since then, I knew that the Holy Father would declare calmly but clearly to the world that he supports the oppressed. During this year of his pontificate, he met with Zelenskyy three times (May, July and December). These gestures were aimed to support people of Ukraine and we all, including Basilian Sisters from Ukraine, felt how healing for us they were. The Holy Father persistently calls for peace throughout the world, wherever wars are destroying human lives. He never forgets Ukraine.



Basilian Sr. Emanujila Vishka uses a prayer rope to pray in an undated photo. (Courtesy of Emanujila Vishka)

At this moment, he is an authority on whom we rely for spiritual and moral guidance. I personally believe that St. Catherine of Siena listened to our prayers with great care. Even now, as I type these reflections on my laptop, I occasionally glance at the picture from our private audience last June, in which I am telling Leo about our order.

In my hands is a gift for him — a handmade Eastern Christian prayer rope. We noticed that, unlike all the other gifts that were taken to another room, Leo handed it to one of the priests accompanying him. Who knows — perhaps he prays using this Basilian-made prayer rope. This is just a hopeful guess. But I am sure that we are all included in his prayers to be brave, to stay strong and loving, to persistently build bridges of hope and peace in the order and world.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV's First Year** feature series. View the full series.