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Pope Leo XIV Welcomes 120 Cycling Legends to the Vatican

A true story of faith under pressure. Read the first half below, then continue online.

KEY SPIRITUAL TAKEAWAY

"Can be understood as a metaphor for that 'life in abundance' that is characteristic of every authentic sporting experience."

(Transliterated from the original Hindi.)

They had gathered only to pray. When prayer itself becomes the target, faith is proved not by words but by staying.

The Story - Part One

Pope Leo XIV welcomed around 120 former and current cycling champions to the Vatican on Monday 23 November 2026, in an audience promoted by the Union Cycliste Internationale, the sport's world governing body. Among them were Eddy Merckx, Francesco Moser, Miguel Indurain, Jeannie Longo-Ciprelli, Demi Vollering, Bernard Hinault, Greg LeMond, Chris Froome, Vincenzo Nibali, Mark Cavendish, Annemiek van Vleuten and Paul Seixas.

The Pope told the riders that cycling "can be understood as a metaphor for that 'life in abundance' that is characteristic of every authentic sporting experience." It was a warm welcome for a room full of champions.

The most striking voice in the room belonged to a man who knows what it means to come back from the edge. Greg LeMond is a two-time UCI Road World Champion and a three-time Tour de France winner, the first American ever to win the Tour, and he has lived through a career that nearly ended more than once.

He said the Pope's message matched his own view of the sport exactly, and he put it in words any rider would understand.

"Sports are unifying for people. You can have all the differences - political, racial, etc. - But when you get on a bike, you're one. There is no difference," LeMond said.

It landed in a room full of champions who nodded along. They have all felt it on the road, where the only thing that matters is the next pedal stroke.

Pope Leo spoke to the cyclists as a fan as much as a pope. Recalling his own experience of following cycling events, he told them that following the exploits of athletes "goes beyond the competitive event itself," with victories and defeats expressing "the values and challenges of which human experience is made up."

He was talking about what sport does to a person, and what a person finds in sport when the race is over and the crowd has gone home. He also spoke about the quiet side of cycling, the part the cameras never show.

The Turning Point - What Happens Next

The story reaches a life-changing moment that changes everything -- and what seemed like the end is only the middle. Two reports disagree on the numbers, and one question is left unanswered: will the CCTV footage ever come out? Read the full story to find out what happens next.

PERSONAL REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When gathering to pray carries a real cost, what keeps a community coming together anyway -- and what would keep you coming?

2. The pastor's sister shielded him with her own body and fainted under the blows. What does costly, self-giving love look like in your own family or church?

3. When justice is delayed and a complaint is withdrawn under threat, how do believers hold on to truth without giving in to fear -- or to hatred?

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