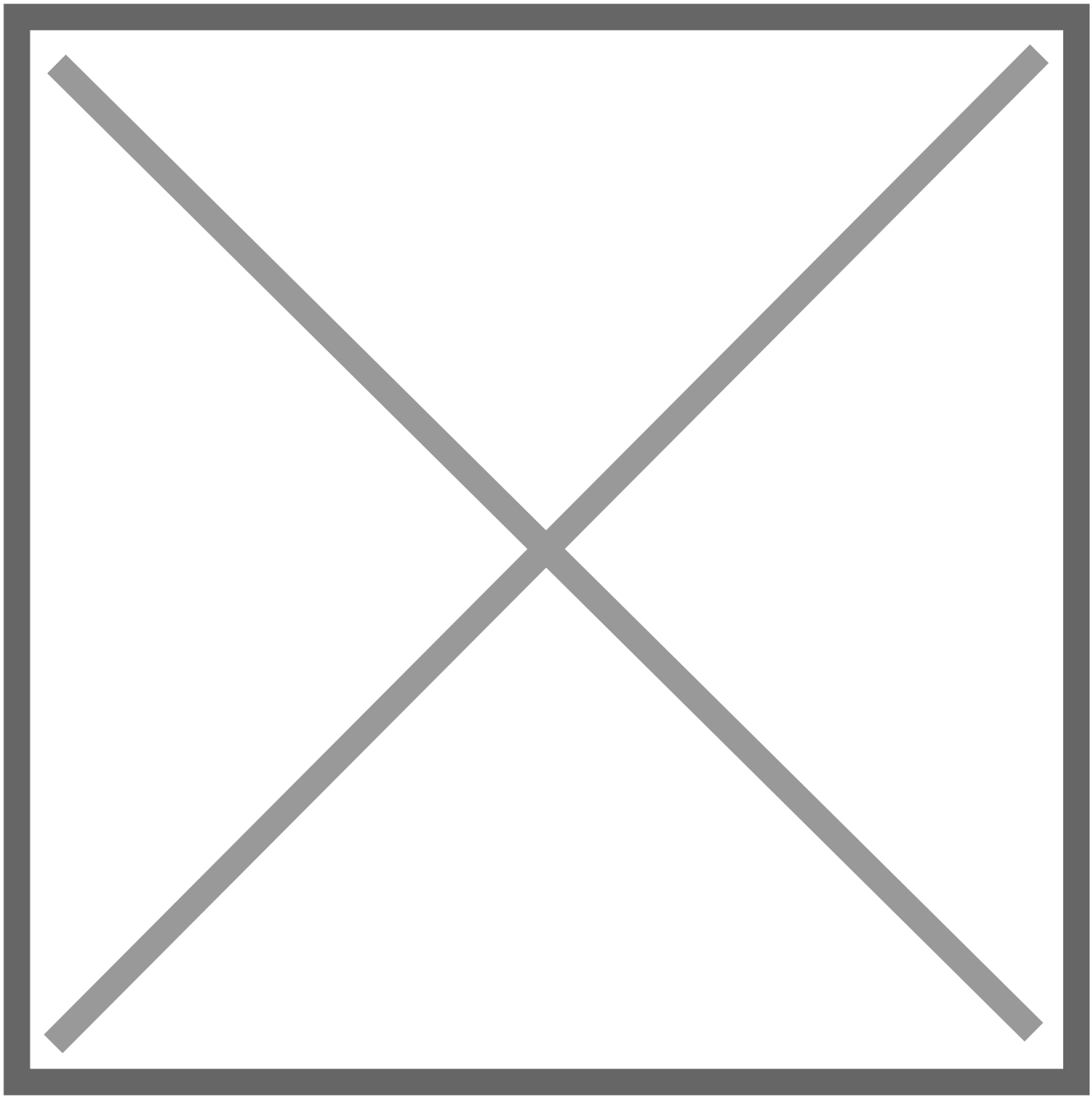
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



People participate as Pope Francis leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 27, 2020. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Conversion is an ongoing process that relies on God's endless patience and grace, Pope Francis said.

Living a Christian life "is not made up of dreams and beautiful aspirations, but of concrete commitments, in order to open ourselves ever more to God's will and to love for our brothers and sisters," he said Sept. 27, talking about the day's Gospel reading before reciting the Angelus prayer with visitors in St. Peter's Square.

He had also focused on the meaning of conversion the evening before when he celebrated Mass with the Vatican gendarme, or police, at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica.

"The path to conversion is drawing near, it's closeness, but a closeness that is service," he told the officers. "Every time you draw near to serve [someone], you imitate Jesus Christ."

"Jesus asks you to be like him: strong, disciplined, but humble and in service," the pope said.

The Gospels are full of stories about Jesus spending time with sinners, he said. "They felt close to Jesus, not judged. But Jesus never lied" to them. Instead, he would tell them, "'The truth is this. The path is this.' But he would say it with love, with his heart, like a brother would."

Before reciting the Angelus the next morning, Francis told hundreds of people in a very rainy St. Peter's Square that "God is patient with each of us: he does not tire, he does not give up" even when someone tells him "no."

"He leaves us free even to distance ourselves from him and to make mistakes," the pope said. "Thinking about God's patience is wonderful — how the Lord always waits for us. He is always beside us to help us, but he respects our freedom. And he anxiously awaits our 'yes' so he can welcome us anew in his fatherly arms and fill us with his boundless mercy."

Saying "yes" to God is something believers are called to do each day, choosing good over evil, truth over lies and love for others over selfishness, he said.

"But conversion, changing the heart, is a process, a process that purifies us from moral encrustations," the pope said. "And at times it is a painful process, because there is no path of holiness without some sacrifice and without a spiritual battle."

To succeed, he said, God's grace is essential. "Conversion is a grace we must always ask for: 'Lord, give me the grace to improve. Give me the grace to be a good Christian.'"

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