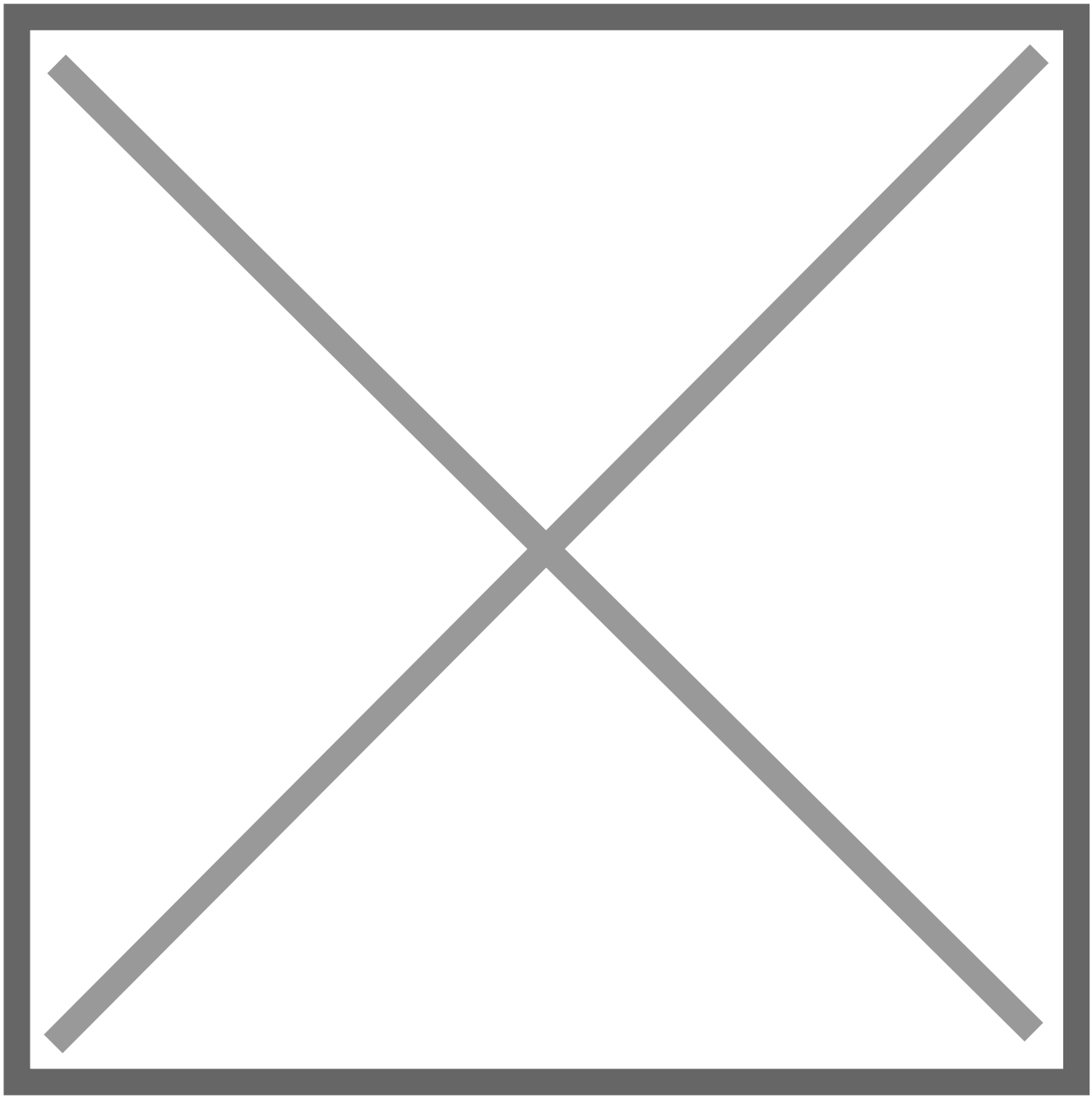
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis leads his weekly general audience from the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Dec. 30, 2020. In his main talk, the pope focused on the importance of thanking God and letting others see one's gratitude. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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The gratitude that comes from encountering Christ's love and mercy is enough to bring joy and hope to a troubled world, Pope Francis said.

"If we are bearers of gratitude, the world itself will become better, even if only a little bit, but that is enough to transmit a bit of hope," the pope said Dec. 30 during his weekly general audience.

"The world is in need of hope, and with gratitude — with this attitude of thanksgiving — we can transmit a bit of hope," he said.

At the audience, which was livestreamed from the library of the Apostolic Palace, the pope continued his series of talks on prayer, reflecting on prayers of thanksgiving as exemplified in the Gospel story of the 10 lepers healed by Jesus.

After the lepers cry out for mercy, Jesus healed them and sent them to the high priests to verify their healing. However, the pope noted, only one returned "to thank Jesus and to praise God for the grace received."

"This narrative divides the world in two," the pope said. There are "those who do not give thanks and those who do; those who take everything as if it were owed them and those who welcome everything as a gift, as grace."

Prayers of thanksgiving, he continued, begin with the recognition that "grace precedes us" and the knowledge that "we were loved before we learned how to love."

"If we view life like this, then 'thank you' becomes the driving force of our day," the pope said. "And many times, we forget to say, 'thank you.'"

Christians also experience gratitude when participating in the Eucharist and blessing God "for the gift of life," he added.

"To live is above all to have received," he said. "All of us are born because someone wanted us to have life. And this is only the first of a long series of debts that we incur by living; debts of gratitude."

Continuing his reflection on the story of the lepers, the pope said that while all of them experienced joy after being healed, the one who returned to give thanks received an "additional joy" that only comes from an encounter with Jesus.

"He is not only freed from illness, but he now possesses the certainty of being loved," the pope said. "And this is the nucleus: when you give thanks, you express the certainty of being loved. This is a big step; to have the certainty of being loved."

Francis urged Christians not only to experience "the joy of encountering Jesus" but also to "cultivate joyfulness," which is a gift of Jesus. The devil, on the other hand, "after deceiving us with some temptation, leaves us sad and alone."

"If we are in Christ, there is no sin and no threat that can ever prevent us from continuing joyfully on our way," the pope said.

"The path to happiness," the pope said, is the one St. Paul described in his First Letter to the Thessalonians: "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit."

"Do not quench the Spirit we have within us that brings us to gratitude," the pope added.

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