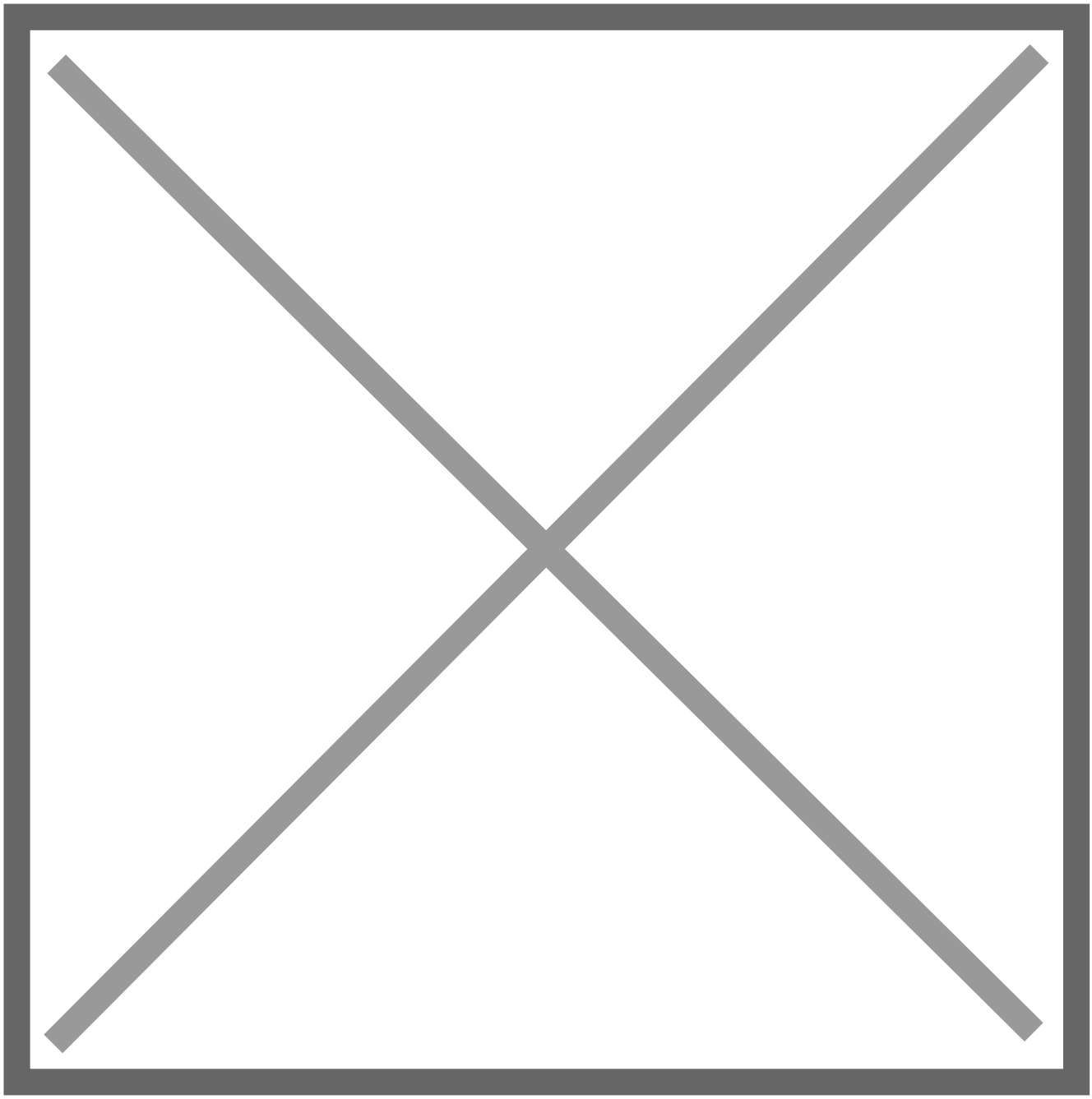
Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis leads his general audience in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican April 14, 2021. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Without prayer, everything crumbles and any initiatives for church reform will just be proposals by some group and not the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Pope Francis said.

"Everything in the church originates in prayer and everything grows thanks to prayer," the pope said April 14 during his weekly general audience.

If there is no prayer, the church becomes "like an empty shell" that has lost its bearings and "no longer possesses its source of warmth and love," he said, and it ends up being made up of groups of "entrepreneurs of faith" that are well organized and busy with charitable activities but lack faith.

Continuing his series of talks on prayer, the pope reflected on the role of the church as a school of faith and prayer.

"The breath of faith is prayer," the pope said. "We grow in faith inasmuch as we learn to pray," and over time, especially after crises or difficult periods in life, "we become aware that without faith, we could not have made it through and that our strength was prayer."

That is why groups or communities that are dedicated to prayer "flourish in the church" and can become "centers of spiritual light, small oases in which intense prayer is shared and fraternal communion is constructed day by day," breathing life into the church and society itself, he said.

"Praying and working in community keeps the world going," Francis said.

When the devil wants to attack the church, he starts with sapping its strength by hindering prayer, he said.

For example, he said, "we see this in certain groups who agree to promote church reforms, changes in the life of the church" and they may be very well organized and have wide media outreach, "but you don't see any prayer."

The groups may have interesting ideas and proposals, but these only emerged from talking and through the media, not prayer, the pope said.

"Prayer is what opens the door to the Holy Spirit," who inspires the path forward, he said. "Changes in the church without prayer are not changes made by the church, they are changes made by groups."

Prayer gives people strength, he said, leading one's life "securely forward" no matter how lowly, imperfect or weak one's life may be.

"Holy women and men do not have easier lives than other people" since they have problems, too, and face opposition, he said. But with prayer, the saints "nourish the flame of their faith" and even though they often "count for little in the eyes of the world, they are in reality the ones who sustain it, not with the weapons of money and power, of the communications media and so on, but with the weapon of prayer."

Christians, he said, should ask themselves whether they pray and reflect on how they pray, for example, "like parrots or do I pray with my heart?"

Do people pray with the church or "do I pray a bit according to my ideas and then make my ideas become prayer? This is a pagan prayer, not Christian," he added.

The essential task of the church, the pope said, is to pray and to teach people how to pray and to hand down the "lamp of faith and the oil of prayer from generation to generation."

"Without faith everything collapses; and without prayer faith is extinguished," he said. But as long as "there is the oil of prayer," the lamp of faith will always be lit on earth.

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