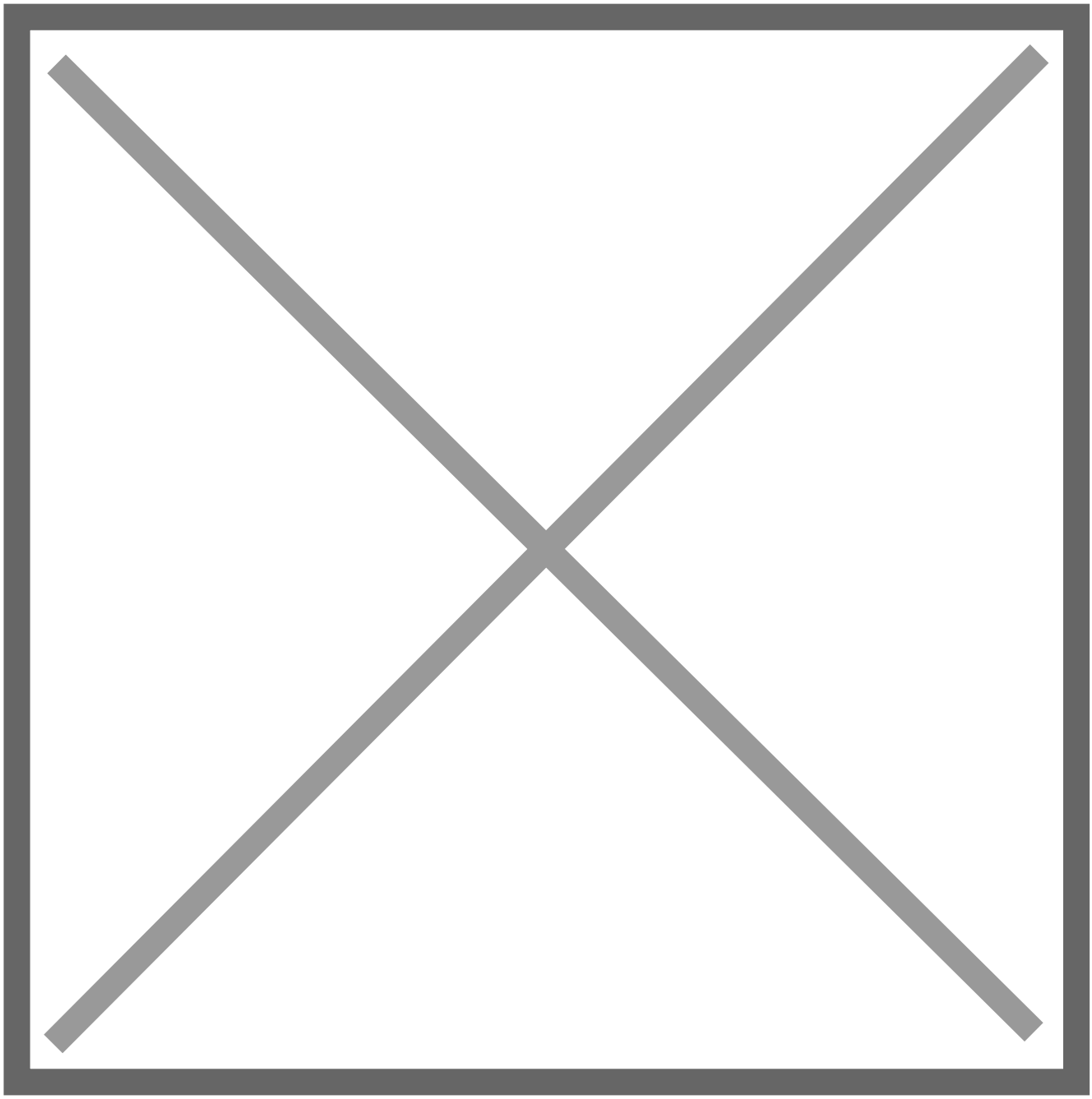
Vatican
News



Pope Francis arrives to celebrate a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican May 16, 2021. Celebrating Mass with the Myanmar community living in Rome, the pope prayed for an end to violence in their country. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

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Celebrating a Mass for peace in Myanmar, Pope Francis urged the country's Catholics to "keep the faith."

"To keep the faith is to keep our gaze lifted up to heaven, as here on earth, battles are fought and innocent blood is shed," he said at the Mass May 16. "To keep the faith is to refuse to yield to the logic of hatred and vengeance, but to keep our gaze fixed on the God of love, who calls us to be brothers and sisters to one another."

Francis had invited Catholics from Myanmar living in Rome to the Mass at the Altar of the Chair in St. Peter's Basilica. The congregation included about 100 women religious and about 70 priests and seminarians studying in Rome or working at the headquarters of their religious orders.

Fr. Bosco Mung Sawng, a priest from Myanmar studying at the Pontifical Urbanian University in Rome, spoke on their behalf at the end of the liturgy, thanking Francis and telling him, "This Mass is a great occasion for healing, not only for those of us here, but for the thousands of Catholics in Myanmar and for the Myanmar diaspora throughout the world."

"Myanmar is now in God's hands. Our tears, our bitter discouragement [and] our shattered peace, call for divine intervention," he said. "We firmly believe that this extraordinary event in Rome with our pastor is the starting point of God's intervention in our history."

The Asian nation has been embroiled in violence since Feb. 1 when the Myanmar military took power, declaring elections the previous November invalid. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands arrested.

In an interview with America magazine May 14, Cardinal Charles Bo of Yangon, president of the nation's bishops' conference, said, "Our people need democracy, but they also need daily food."

"The conflict has thrown millions into starvation, so there is an urgent need for peaceful solutions," the cardinal told America.

"In these days when your beloved country of Myanmar is experiencing violence, conflict and repression," Francis said in his homily, the country's Catholics are called to keep the faith, keep praying, promote unity and defend truth.

Division is "a deadly disease," he said. "We experience it in our hearts, because we are divided within; we experience it in families and communities, among peoples, even in the church."

"Sins against unity abound: envy, jealousy, the pursuit of personal interests rather than the common good, the tendency to judge others," Pope Francis said. "Those little conflicts of ours find a reflection in great conflicts, like the one your country is experiencing in these days."

"Once partisan interests and the thirst for profit and power take over, conflicts and divisions inevitably break out," he said.

Each individual can and must make a contribution to promoting unity and peaceful coexistence, the pope told them. "We are also called to do this as a church; let us promote dialogue, respect for others, care for our brothers and sisters, communion!"

"We cannot allow a partisan way of thinking to enter into the church, a way of thinking that divides, that puts ourselves at the center while casting others aside," he said. "This is very destructive; it destroys the family, the church, the society and each one of us."

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