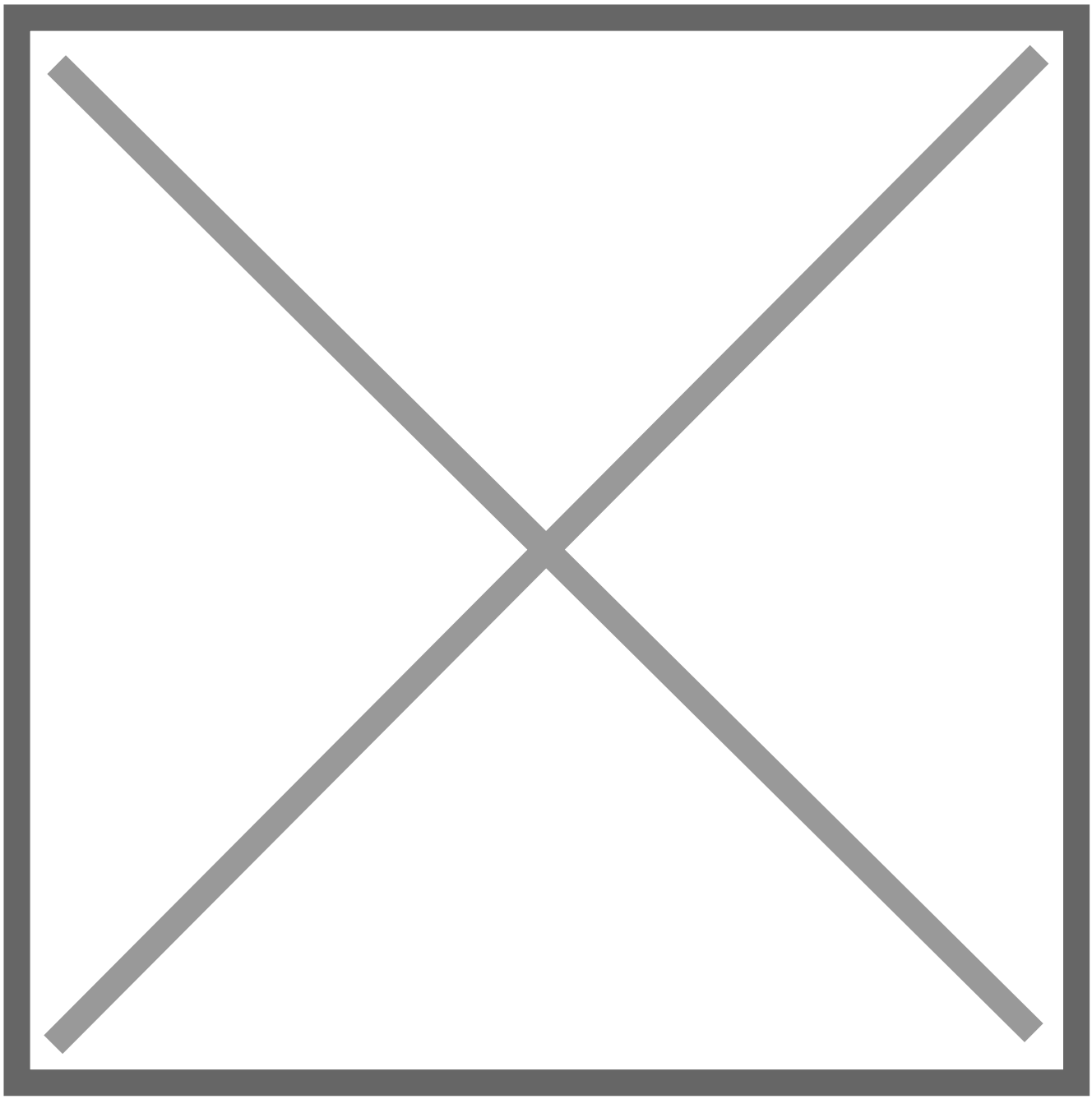
News



Venice residents hold a protest to demand an end to cruise ships passing through the Italian lagoon city, as the first cruise ship of the summer season departs from the port June 5, 2021. (CNS photo/Manuel Silvestri, Reuters)

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Vatican City — August 3, 2021

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Now that giant cruise ships are banned from fragile waterways near the historic center of Venice, the time has come for the city to become a model of sustainability and supportive of its residents, said the city's archbishop, Francesco Moraglia.

"The risk is (the city) becomes just a container that offers opportunities for events and exhibitions, just a huge stage. The real challenge for Venice is remaining a livable city" that prioritizes children and elderly residents first, since the high cost of living forces many families to move elsewhere, he told Vatican News July 31.

"I believe that this city, besides becoming the world capital of sustainability, could truly become a study in the church's social teachings," guided in particular by the vision of "Laudato Si'," he said.

The Italian government approved a measure, which went into effect Aug. 1, banning certain vessels from passing through the basin and canal near St. Mark's Square and the shallow Giudecca Canal.

The banned vessels include all cruise liners and ships that exceed one or more of the following: a 25,000 ton-weight limit; 590 feet (180 meters) in length; 115 feet (35 meters) in height; or strict limits on sulphur emissions, which contribute to acid rain.

Ships and boats that fall under the limits can continue to cruise and dock in the lagoon areas, while banned vessels will be temporarily diverted to an industrial port on the mainland shore west of Venice until a permanent solution is found. For now, smaller ships are expected to shuttle the thousands of passengers from the

mainland dock to the historic center each day.

The move came after UNESCO was ready to put Venice on its list of "endangered" World Heritage sites. The U.N. body has expressed worries about the negative impact and further threats caused by the cruise industry, mass tourism, climate change and extreme weather events.

Moraglia told Vatican News the new mandate was "certainly a good start and good news for defending and safeguarding the city of Venice."

However, he added, there are deep concerns about the impact the ban will have on employment since many jobs risk being lost -- given the city's dependence on mass tourism -- if there are significant delays to getting the temporary port and the future new port ready for operations.

The city has also been hard hit, like others, by the drop in tourism due to the COVID-19 pandemic and by increased flooding the past two years, he said.

St. Mark's Basilica is in dire need of funding for repair, restoration and protection from future floods, he said.

Given these varied concerns, he said, including a need for more sustainable tourism, "we can see that the text of 'Laudato Si'' that Pope Francis gave us six years ago" should become an inspirational guide and "a vision" for the future of Venice. The papal encyclical speaks of integral ecology, which seeks harmony between human needs, the economy and the environment.

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