Francis, the comic strip
Pope Francis holds the hand of a man during a visit with refugees at the government-run Rec

Pope Francis holds the hand of a man during a visit with refugees at the government-run Reception and Identification Center in Mytilene, Greece, Dec. 5, 2021. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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The best way to overcome indifference to the suffering of migrants and refugees is to look in their faces, Pope Francis said.

"In Cyprus, as in Lesbos, (Greece), I was able to look into the eyes of this suffering. Please, let us look into the eyes of the discarded people we meet, let us be provoked by the faces of the children, children of desperate migrants," the pope said Dec. 8 after reciting the Angelus prayer with visitors in St. Peter's Square.

"Let us allow ourselves to be drawn into their suffering in order to react to our indifference; let us look at their faces, to awaken us from the sleep of habit," the pope said.

With the Angelus prayer replacing his weekly general audience Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis used the opportunity to thank the governments and churches of Cyprus and Greece for their hospitality during his trip to the countries Dec. 2-6.

He also shared with the crowd in the square what he considered the highlights of his trip: his meetings with the heads of the Orthodox churches of the two countries and his meetings with migrants and refugees.

Pope Francis said he was particularly "moved" by Orthodox Archbishop Chrysostomos II of Cyprus, who "spoke to me about the 'mother church': As Christians we follow different paths, but we are children of Jesus' church, which is a mother, and accompanies and keeps us, that keeps us going, all as brothers and sisters."

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In Greece, he said, "I experienced the gift of embracing again" Orthodox Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and all Greece, with whom he had visited the Greek island of Lesbos in 2016.

"I entrust to the holy Mother of God the many seeds of encounter and hope that the Lord has scattered on this pilgrimage," the pope said, asking those in the square "to continue to pray that they may germinate in patience and flourish in trust."

And while expressing sorrow over "the wound of barbed wire" that separates the northern, mainly Turkish Cypriot part of Cyprus from the mainly Greek Cypriot south, the pope prayed that encounter would prevail over confrontation.

But, with Cyprus hosting the most migrants per capita of any country in the European Union, he also prayed that it would be an example for all of welcoming "our brother and sister, especially when he or she is poor, discarded, a migrant."

"Before the faces of those who emigrate, we cannot remain silent, we cannot turn away," Pope Francis said.