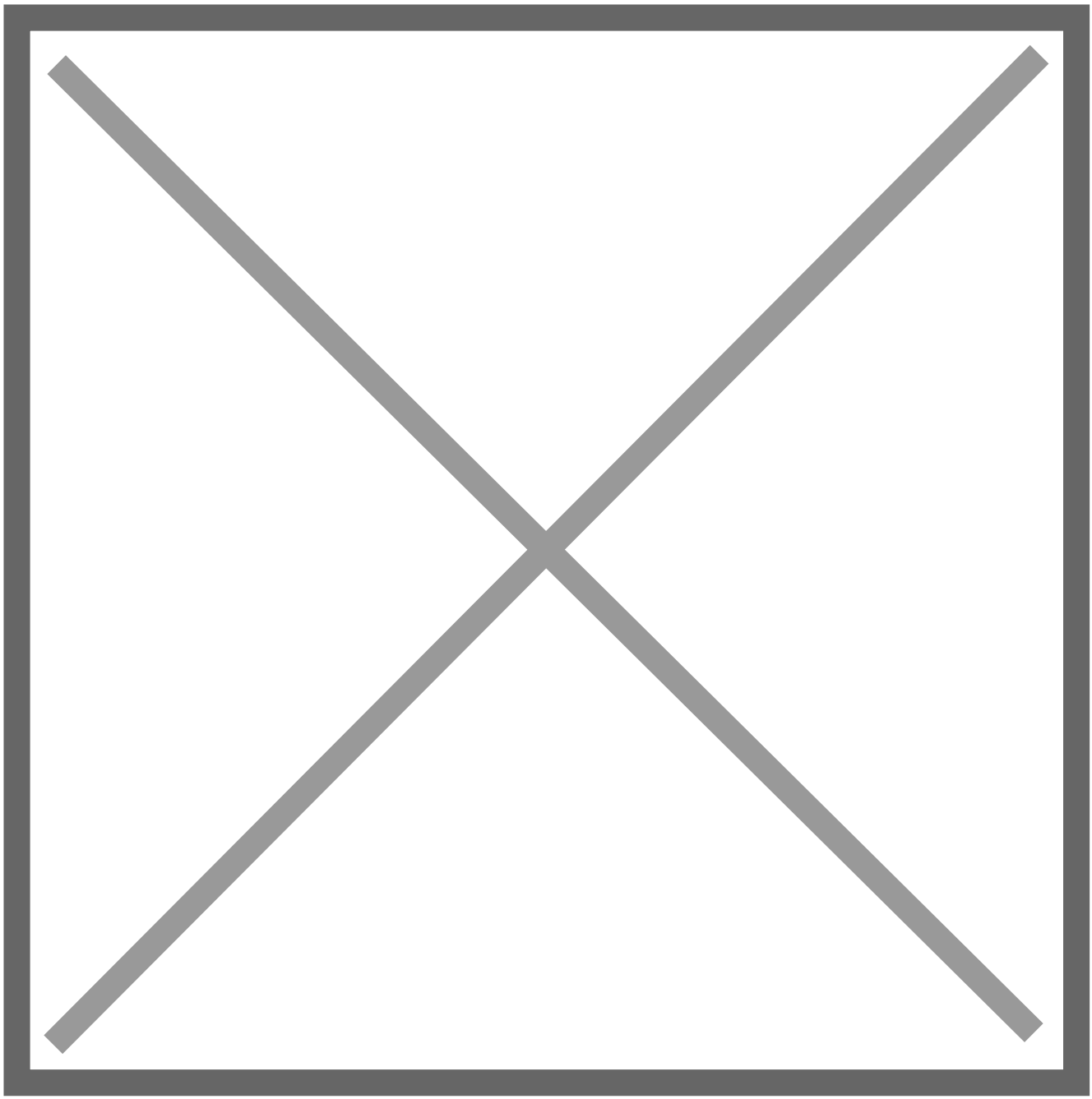
Vatican



Pope Francis greets the crowd after celebrating Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 10, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

by Associated Press

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Pope Francis opened Holy Week on April 10 with a call for an Easter truce in Ukraine to make room for a negotiated peace, highlighting the need for leaders to "make some sacrifices for the good of the people."

Celebrating Palm Sunday Mass before crowds in St. Peter's Square for the first time since the pandemic, Francis called for "weapons to be laid down to begin an Easter truce, not to reload weapons and resume fighting, no! A truce to reach peace through real negotiations."

Francis did not refer directly to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but the reference was clear, and he has repeatedly denounced the war and the suffering brought to innocent civilians.

During the traditional Sunday blessing following Palm Sunday Mass, the pontiff said leaders should be "willing to make some sacrifices for the good of the people."

"In fact, what a victory would that be, who plants a flag under a pile of rubble?"

During his Palm Sunday homily, the pontiff denounced "the folly of war" that leads people to commit "senseless acts of cruelty."

"When we resort to violence ... we lose sight of why we are in the world and even end up committing senseless acts of cruelty. We see this in the folly of war, where Christ is crucified yet another time," he said.

Francis lamented "the unjust death of husbands and sons" ... "refugees fleeing bombs" ... "young people deprived of a future" ... and "soldiers sent to kill their brothers and sisters."

After two years of celebrating Palm Sunday Mass inside St. Peter's Basilica without a crowd due to pandemic distancing measures, the solemn celebration returned to the square outside. Tens of thousands pilgrims and tourists clutched olive branches and

braided palms emblematic of the ceremony that recalls Jesus' return to Jerusalem.

Traditionally, the pope leads a Palm Sunday procession through St. Peter's Square before celebrating Mass. Francis has been suffering from a strained ligament in his right knee that has caused him to limp, and he was driven in a black car to the altar, which he then reached with the help of an aide. He left the Mass on the open-top popemobile, waving to the faithful in the piazza and along part of the via della Conciliazione.

Palm Sunday opens Holy Week leading up to Easter, which this year falls on April 17, and features the Good Friday Way of the Cross Procession.

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