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A person in a white helmet sprays water into a landscape full of fire and a burned out building

Firefighters work at the site of an industrial warehouse destroyed by a Russian drone strike in Lviv, Ukraine, Sept. 19, 2023. (OSV News photo/ Reuters/ Press service of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine in Lviv region handout)

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Vatican City — September 22, 2023
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In a message to an ecumenical meeting at a historic Benedictine abbey in Hungary, Pope Francis said Russia's war on Ukraine is a reminder of what the Second Vatican Council taught: "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself."

Such war "merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation," the pope continued, quoting Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

In the message released Sept. 22, Francis told those gathered for the ecumenical meeting at Hungary's ancient Pannonhalma Archabbey that each person has a role to play in bringing peace to the world.

"At this time, the war in Ukraine has dramatically called us to open our eyes and hearts to so many peoples suffering from war," he said. "Let each of us remain on the path of peace; let us each become messengers and servants of peace in the place where we live and work! Above all, let us pray for peace!"

The Benedictine monastic tradition and its Rule of St. Benedict, although written for monks and monastery communities, can be "an excellent guide for a conscious and practical commitment to peace," the pope wrote.

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St. Benedict was "very lucid about the differences and inequalities that exist among community members," the pope said. His rule for monastic life showed that he recognized "the complexity of linguistic, ethnic and cultural traits, which is both an asset and a potential for conflict. Yet, he has a serene and peaceful outlook because he is fully convinced of the equal dignity and value of all human beings."

His admonition that all monasteries and all monks must welcome the stranger and the foreigner and "honor" all men and women "is the foundation of peace in the monastic community, as well as in interpersonal, social and international relations," the pope said. And his hope that members of the community would try to outdo each other in doing good also means he urges them "to take the first step in certain difficult situations."

"St. Benedict's vision of peace is not utopian, but points to a path that God's friendship with people has already traced and that, nevertheless, must be walked by each person and the community step by step," he said.

It is a matter of seeking justice, he said, and not of trying to build blocs of power.