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Pope Francis gives his blessing at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square

Pope Francis gives his blessing at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Sept. 27. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Hope and fraternity must be kept alive, organized and coordinated into concrete action so every crisis can be read as an opportunity and dealt with positively, Pope Francis said.

"Hope needs to be restored to our European societies, especially to the new generations," he told people gathered in St. Peter's Square for his weekly general audience Sept. 27.

"In fact, how can we welcome others if we ourselves do not first have a horizon open to the future?" he said.

The pope followed his usual practice of speaking about his latest trip at the first general audience after his return. The pope went to Marseille — an ancient port city

on the Mediterranean Sea and France's second-largest city — Sept. 22-23 to highlight the challenges and opportunities across the entire Mediterranean region and to focus on the plight of migrants crossing its waters.

"We know the Mediterranean is the cradle of civilization and a cradle is for life! It is not tolerable that it become a tomb, neither should it be a place of conflict," war and human trafficking, he said, referring to the thousands of men, women and children who fall into the hands of traffickers offering them passage into Europe and to those who die from unsafe conditions on the sea or in detention.

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The Mediterranean bridges Africa, Asia and Europe and their people, cultures, philosophies and religions, he said. But a harmonious connection "does not happen magically, neither is it accomplished once and for all. It is the fruit of a journey in which each generation is called to travel."

The pope explained he went to Marseille to take part in the conclusion of the "Mediterranean Meetings," which brought together bishops, mayors, young people and others from the Mediterranean area to look toward the future with hope.

"This is the dream, this is the challenge: that the Mediterranean might recover its vocation, that of being a laboratory of civilization and peace," the pope said.

Otherwise, he said, "how can young people, who are poor in hope, closed in on their private lives, worried about managing their own precariousness, open themselves to meeting others and to sharing?"

Communities, which are so often "sickened by individualism, by consumerism and by empty escapism, need to open themselves; their souls and spirits need to be oxygenated, and then they will be able to read the crisis as an opportunity and deal with it positively," he said.

What came out of the Marseille event, he said, was an outlook on the Mediterranean that was hopeful and "simply human, not ideological, not strategic, not politically correct nor instrumental."

"Europe needs to retrieve passion and enthusiasm. And I can say that I found passion and enthusiasm in Marseille," the pope said, thanking its archbishop, Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline, the priests, religious, lay faithful and the many people who "showed great warmth during the Mass in the Vélodrome Stadium."

He also thanked President Emmanuel Macron, "whose presence testified that all of France was paying attention to the event in Marseille."

The pope prayed that the Mediterranean region may become "what it has always been called to be — a mosaic of civilization and hope."

At the end of his main audience talk, the pope gave special greetings to the diaconate class of the Pontifical North American College, together with their families and friends. "Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!"

Some 18 seminarians in their fourth year of studies in Rome were to be ordained to the transitional diaconate in St. Peter's Basilica Sept. 28.