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Pope Francis raises his right hand as he speaks into a microphone

Pope Francis gives his blessing at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican Oct. 18, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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Warning against a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and ongoing conflicts elsewhere, Pope Francis has called for a day of fasting, penance and prayer for peace in the world Oct. 27.

"War does not solve any problems, it only sows death and destruction. It increases hatred, multiplies revenge. War erases the future," he said at the end of his general audience talk in St. Peter's Square Oct. 18.

"Our thoughts go to Palestine and Israel," he said to applause.

"Casualties are rising and the situation in Gaza is desperate," he said. "Please, may everything possible be done to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe."

What is also "disturbing," he said, is the possibility the conflict will spread just as so many other battles of war are being waged in the world.

"Please," he said, "let us continue to pray for peace in the world, especially in tormented Ukraine," a tragedy that is no longer talked about but continues.

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"Silence the weapons. Listen to the cry of the poor, the people, the children, for peace," the pope said.

He urged all people of faith to take "just one side in this conflict: that of peace. But not with words, with prayer, with total dedication."

For this reason, he said, he has decided to call for a day of fasting, prayer and penance Oct. 27.

The pope invited men and women of every Christian denomination and other religions as well as those committed to the cause of peace to participate in any way they feel is appropriate.

There will be an hour of prayer starting at 6 p.m. Rome time in St. Peter's "imploring for peace in the world," he said, and local churches are invited to organize similar initiatives.