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Pope Francis bows his head and folds his hands as he stands in front of a microphone and his

Pope Francis prays during his weekly general audience Nov. 8, 2023, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



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As the wars, violence and deaths continue in Ukraine and in the Holy Land, Pope Francis again urged people to pray for peace.

"Let us think about and pray for populations suffering from war," he said Nov. 8 at the end of his weekly general audience. "Do not forget the tormented Ukraine and think of the Palestinian and Israeli people. May the Lord bring about a just peace."

The pope then paused for silent prayer.

"They are suffering so much," he said. "Children are suffering. The sick are suffering. The elderly suffer. And many young people are dying."

"War is always a defeat," the pope repeated. "Don't forget this: It is always a defeat."

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After giving his main talk in Italian and greeting groups of people from various countries present at the audience in St. Peter's Square, Francis turned to his aide, Msgr. Luis Maria Rodrigo Ewart, and asked if there was a text of an appeal for him to read. When there was not, the pope closed his eyes and made the appeal for prayers spontaneously.

The day before the audience, Vatican News and the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, published an interview with Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem.

"The war will end sooner or later, but the consequences of this war will be terrible," the cardinal said. "You see, there are two issues that seem particularly worrisome to me. The first is that both sides seem to lack a strategic vision that goes beyond the annihilation of the other. Even the land itself appears to have taken a back seat in respect to the desire for mutual destruction. There is no exit strategy."

The second issue, he said, is the difficulty Israelis and Palestinians have of "distancing themselves, even emotionally, from the heavy past of both peoples, the Holocaust and the Nakba, which was evoked on October 7th," when Hamas militants entered Israel and went on their killing and kidnapping rampage. "Nakba" refers to the mass displacement of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

"Something has broken. I hope not irreparably. But it will take a long time and a lot of effort to rebuild," the cardinal said, according to Vatican News in English. "The scaffolding was certainly shaky" before Oct. 7, "and we worked on it with great difficulty. Every now and then, a plank would fall. Now the entire scaffolding has come down. We will have to start all over again."