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Pope Francis prays the "Regina Coeli" in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 12, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org

Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js



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Pope Francis reiterated the Vatican's willingness to aid in a comprehensive prisoner swap between Russia and Ukraine.

"I renew my appeal for a general exchange of all the prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, assuring the willingness of the Holy See to favor any effort in this regard, especially for those who are gravely injured and ill," he said after praying the "Regina Coeli" in St. Peter's Square May 12.

In February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said more than 3,000 Ukrainian prisoners of war had been freed from Russian captivity, and the United Arab Emirates mediated an exchange of 100 prisoners between Russia and Ukraine that same month.

The pope also appealed for prayers for peace in Ukraine, Palestine, Israel and Myanmar in remarks to people gathered in St. Peter's Square.

During an airborne press conference April 30, 2023 — some 14 months after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — Francis confirmed that "the Holy See has acted as an intermediary in some exchanges of prisoners" between the warring nations.

The pope had also expressed his hope for a general exchange of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine in his message "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) after celebrating Easter Mass this year; he called for a swap of "all for the sake of all!"

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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, expressed optimism around the pope's calls for a prisoner exchange in an interview published April 27, noting that "the pope's appeal has been taken up and acted upon."

After praying the "Regina Coeli" the pope also noted that May 12 was the church's celebration of World Communications Day, for which the Vatican had chosen as its theme "Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart."

"Only by restoring a wisdom of the heart can we interpret the demands of our time and rediscover the way toward a fully human communication," he said.

And, as Italy and several other countries celebrated Mother's Day, Francis encouraged people to be grateful for all mothers and to "pray for the mothers who have gone to heaven."

"Let us entrust mothers to the protection of Mary, our heavenly mother," he said before asking the visitors in the square for a big round of applause for all mothers.