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Pope Francis participates in a memorial prayer March 7, 2021, at Hosh al-Bieaa, the church square, in Mosul, Iraq, for the victims of the ISIS war. Syriac Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Chaldean Catholic churches were all destroyed in the war between 2014 and 2017. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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Vatican City — June 6, 2024
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Marking 80 years since some 4,400 Allied troops "heroically gave their lives" to the cause of freedom by storming the beach in Normandy, D-Day commemorations remind the world that disrupting peace in pursuit of worldly interests is a grave sin, Pope Francis said.

To pursue "ideological, nationalistic or economic ambitions" at the cost of peace "is a grave fault before humanity and history, a sin before God," he wrote in a message to Bishop Jacques Habert of Bayeux and Lisieux, whose diocese includes the beaches where Allied troops landed June 6, 1944.

The pope's message was read June 5 during an ecumenical prayer service at the cathedral of Bayeux. Princess Anne of Great Britain attended the service with the ambassadors to France from Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

In his message, the pope said it would be "pointless and hypocritical" to remember the Normandy landings without definitively condemning the "disaster" that was the Second World War with its widespread suffering and ruin.

While the memory of the war previously bolstered people's determination to avoid provoking another global conflict, "I note with sadness that this is no longer the case today and that humankind has a short memory," the pope wrote. "May this commemoration help us to recover it!"

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The prospect of a wide-reaching conflict and the notion that "people are gradually becoming familiar with this unacceptable eventuality" is "worrying," the pope said.

"People want peace!" he wrote. "They want conditions of stability, security and prosperity in which everyone can fulfill their duties and destinies serenely."

The pope asked for prayers "for people who want war" and those who unnecessarily prolong wars or "cynically profit" from them. "May God enlighten their hearts and set before their eyes the trail of misfortune they provoke!" he wrote.

"Wanting peace is not cowardice," the pope wrote. "On the contrary it requires the greatest courage: the courage to know how to give up something."

Francis prayed for the victims of wars past and present, asking that God welcome those who have died in conflict and help those who are suffering due to war today, particularly the poor, the elderly, women and children, "who are always the first victims of these tragedies."