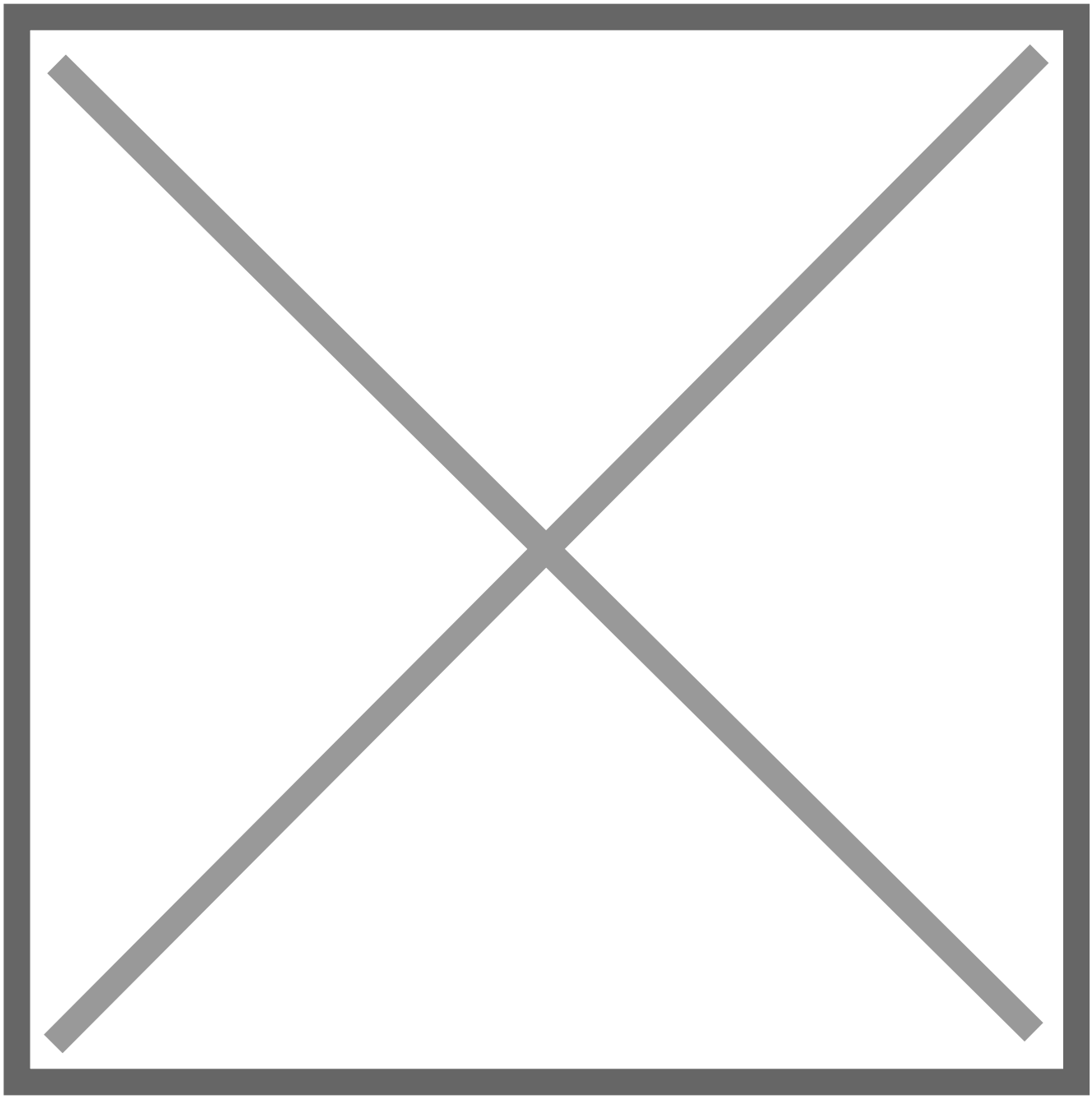
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Pope Leo XIV greets parishioners as he meets members of the Parish of Santa Maria Regina Pacis during a pastoral visit in Ostia Lido, Italy, Feb. 15, 2026, accompanied by Bishop Renato Tarantelli Beccari, vice-regent of the Diocese of Rome, left, and Cardinal Baldassare Reina, papal vicar of Rome, right. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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An authentic Christian community knows how to sincerely and joyfully welcome everyone: Catholics, non-Catholics and people of no faith at all, Pope Leo XIV said.

"A true parish" is where "we all learn to say 'Welcome,' not only with words, but with a spirit of hospitality, opening the door and welcoming everyone," he said, speaking to members of the community during his first visit to a parish in his Diocese of Rome.

The pope also celebrated Mass during which he encouraged the faithful to cultivate humble and peaceful hearts that are open to Christ, because "the evil we see in the world has its roots precisely there, where the heart becomes cold, hard and lacking in mercy."

The pope's early evening visit Feb. 15 was to the Roman parish of Santa Maria Regina Pacis in Ostia Lido — a seaside community 16 miles southwest of Rome.

Although it was his first visit to Ostia as pope, he had been to the area many times as an Augustinian friar because of the port town's close connection to the story of St. Augustine and, especially, his mother, St. Monica, who died there in 387; her remains were moved to Rome in the 15th century.

Leo emphasized the need to convert one's heart for there to be peace in the world, in his homily during Mass inside the large 20th-century church of Santa Maria Regina Pacis.

The path to human fulfillment is fidelity to God based on respect and care for others, he said. But that has to be "cultivated first and foremost in the heart, even before in gestures and words."

The heart is home to noble feelings and "painful profanations: closed-mindedness, envy, jealousy," he said. "Those who think badly of their brother, harboring evil feelings toward him, are as if they were already killing him in their hearts."

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He recalled some of the difficulties facing residents in Ostia, including violence, substance abuse and criminal organizations.

He encouraged the parish community to continue its courageous efforts with other organizations "to spread the good seed of the Gospel in your streets and in your homes."

"Do not resign yourselves to the culture of abuse and injustice. On the contrary, spread respect and harmony, beginning by disarming language and then investing energy and resources in education, especially for children and young people," he said.

"Unfortunately, even today, many clouds still darken the world, with the spread of ideas contrary to the Gospel, which exalt the supremacy of the strongest, encourage arrogance and fuel the seduction of victory at all costs, deaf to the cries of those who suffer and those who are defenseless," the pope said.

"Let us oppose this tendency with the disarming power of meekness, continuing to ask for peace, and to welcome and cultivate its gift with tenacity and humility," he said.

Leo began the visit by greeting young people and families gathered behind the church. A clutch of gold mylar balloons — depicting a smiling lion and the numbers "one" and "four" — bopped and twisted in the strong breeze coming in off the

Mediterranean Sea.

"You are the hope! And you must recognize that in your hearts, in your lives, in your youth, there is hope for today and tomorrow. Hope already begins here, because Jesus walks with us," he told the small enthusiastic crowd outside.

Inside a nearby gym, home of the local "Starfish" basketball team, the pope thanked the community for their warm welcome. "This is one of the many signs of an authentic Christian community, of a true parish," he said, emphasizing the need to receive "anyone who comes: Catholic, non-Catholic, believer, non-believer."

Speaking to the young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, Caritas volunteers and the people they serve, the pope told those gathered that "Everyone is part of this parish family, and everyone has something to say, something to give, something to share."

"May you have the courage to say 'yes' to the Lord!" he said. "Each person's life has great value: whether I am young, whether I am old, whether I have difficulties or not, human life is a gift from God."

Speaking to members of the parish's pastoral council, the pope thanked them for generously offering their time and talent, helping the local clergy, church and faithful. However, "I also encourage you to go out and seek others."

"Do not remain inside the church and say, 'It's OK, those who come are enough.' It is never enough. Invite, welcome, accompany," Leo said.