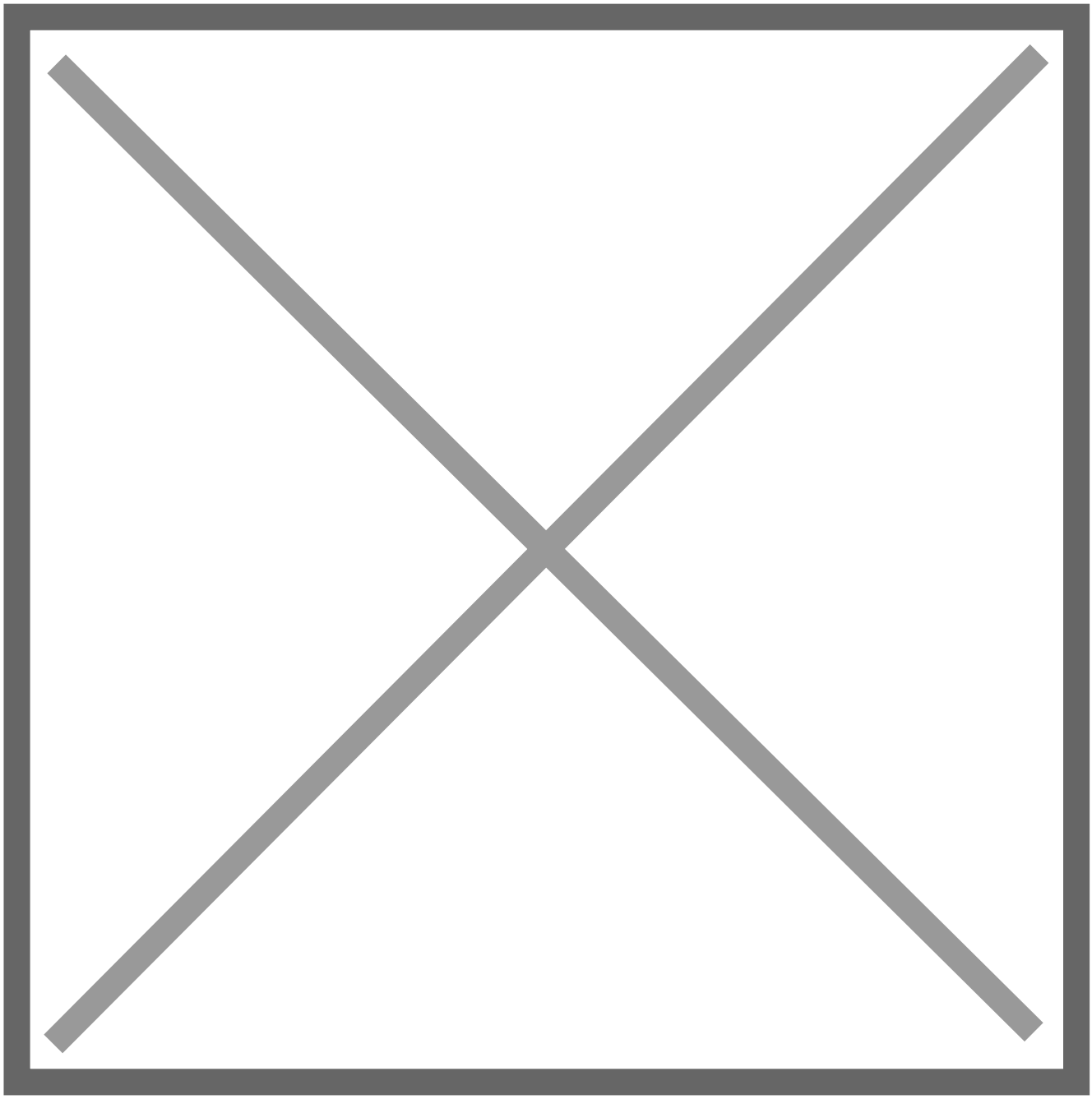
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Pope Leo XIV smiles as he leads the Angelus prayer from a window of the Apostolic Palace, at the Vatican, March 22, 2026. (OSV/Vatican Media/Reuters/Matteo Pernaselci)

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As the U.S. and Israel-Iran war enters its fourth week, and amid a deep humanitarian crisis throughout the region, Pope Leo XIV appealed during his Sunday Angelus prayer March 22: "Persevere in prayer, so that hostilities may cease and paths of peace may finally open up, based on sincere dialogue and respect for the dignity of every human person."

He said he continues to follow "with dismay" the situation in the Middle East, "which like other regions of the world is torn apart by war and violence."

"We cannot remain silent in the face of the suffering of so many people — defenseless victims of these conflicts," Leo underlined. "What wounds them wounds all of humanity. The death and pain caused by these wars are a scandal for the entire human family, and a cry that rises to God."

With Holy Week approaching, the pope called the faithful to move beyond the "tombs" of materialism and selfishness to embrace the Church's promise of eternal life, inviting them to "relive the events of the Lord's Passion — the entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, the trial, the crucifixion, the burial — so that we may grasp their most authentic meaning and open ourselves to the gift of grace they contain."

Christ's grace, Leo said, "illumines this world, which seems to constantly search for novelty and change, even at the cost of sacrificing important things — time, energy,

values, affections — as if fame, material goods, entertainment and fleeting relationships could fill our hearts or make us immortal."

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It is a symptom of a "longing for the infinite that each of us carries within us," the pope said — "a need that cannot be satisfied by passing things."

"Nothing finite can quench our inner thirst, for we are made for God, and we find no peace until we rest in him," he said, citing St. Augustine's Confessions.

Drawing on the story of Lazarus, Leo encouraged believers to "come out" of spiritual emptiness, live renewed lives marked by hope and love, and "free our hearts from habits, conditioning and ways of thinking which, like boulders, shut us away in the tombs of selfishness, materialism, violence and superficiality."

In these places "there is no life," Leo said — "but only confusion, dissatisfaction and loneliness."

With Jesus crying out to "Come out," he urges to "emerge from these cramped spaces, renewed by his grace, to walk in the light of love, as new women and men, capable of hoping and loving, without calculation and without measure, according to the model of his infinite charity," the pope said, before greeting athletes running the Roman marathon.

"May sport pave paths of peace, social inclusion, and spirituality," he said.

This story appears in the **War in Iran** feature series. View the full series.